

HERMANN AGHA

AN EASTERN NARRATIVE



W. GIFFORD · PALGRAVE ·



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HERMANN AGHA.



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HERMANN AGHA:

AN EASTERN NARRATIVE.

BY

W. GIFFORD PALGRAVE,

AUTHOR OF "TRAVELS IN CENTRAL ARABIA,"
ETC.

"I ran it through, even from my boyish days,
To the very moment that he bade me tell it ;
Wherein I spoke of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field,
Of hair-breadth 'scapes,—
Of being taken by the insolent foe
And sold to slavery ; of my redemption thence
And portance in my travels' history."
—*Shakespeare.*

VOL. II.

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1872.

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HERMANN AGHA.

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PART II. (*continued.*)

“BEFORE we parted it was agreed between us that Moḥarib should meet me the next day at a *kaḥwah* which I named in a back street of the town; and should there bring me Zahra’s message. He did so. It appointed the same place and time for the morrow as the day before.

“And now began for me a period of happiness such as I had never known till then, nor have ever since. Though not daily,—that could not be, owing to hindrances arising sometimes from her family and her occupations, sometimes from mine,—my visits at the little door with the red mark, which, by the way, I took care to dull considerably, though not wholly to efface, were frequent; and the door

of paradise never opened on keener joys. The veil was rent between us! her heart lay open to mine, and mine to her; without words we understood each the other's very soul, yet used many words to realize to ourselves our own bliss; as a miser turns over and over in his open palms the treasure which he knew was his all the same while yet locked up in the strong box at his feet. She, however, unfailingly true to herself, never allowed the faintest approach to the familiarity that might, if permitted, have shaken the unsullied bloom from the tree of our happiness; and I, taught by her example, steadily repressed the passion which I felt, and by repressing increased it.

"Often however we could not but laugh together at the security we enjoyed amid the possibilities of discovery and danger on every hand; like those comfortably seated on a firm grass-grown ledge, with precipices all

around. Without, within the dwelling itself, where we met so easily, conversed so unreservedly, loved so ardently, were those to whom the slenderest hint of what was then passing in old Jowhar's chamber would have been the signal for amazement, dismay,—fury, revenge, and blood. Now all was hushed and calm; if any suspicion had for a moment existed, it seemed to have again wholly died away. That I too, Hermann Wolff, a European, a stranger, should be here, Ahmed Agha, a Mahometan, a retainer of a Koordish Beg, unsurmised, undetected, in the haram of a Sheykh of Benoo-Sheyban, conversing with his only daughter, loved by her, pledged to her as she to me, seemed to me at times, and to her also, more a dream than a reality; till strangeness lent a new zest to enjoyment, and wonder to love.

“Often, too, did our talk turn on the future.

She would never consent to wed the Emeer Daghfel : that was her firm, I had almost said her iron, resolve. That she would be mine and mine alone was, though implied rather than expressed in words, not less her certain will. But how ? She would not, and I could not say. Moharib also, who best knew her plans, and had indeed suggested them, waited her order to speak, and in the meantime kept her counsel, eluding my every attempt to draw him into open discussion with persevering adroitness. At times, too, I was tortured by the necessary briefness of our interviews, occasionally also by being obliged to prolong the intervals between them ; but, present or absent, the assurance of her love and the nearness of my hopes sustained me. My treasure, if not yet wholly in my grasp, was not less surely mine.

“ Three weeks passed thus, and no tidings

had reached us of the approach of the hated Emeer,—hated because undesired. But by the end of the first week my master, Ak-Arslan Beg, accompanied by thirty of his men, came in great state to fulfil his engagement at Diar-Bekr, and took up his quarters in the house of his kinsman, the bridegroom, Afsheen Beg. Henceforth my attendance and my services were frequently required; nor could I any longer live apart from the whole band of my fellow-horsemen, nor elude their observation in the manner that I had been able to use with the two stolid Koords, my original associates. So I made the best of this state of affairs, went carefully through whatever my duties in the Beg's household, or the customs of town-life, required; took my full share of visits, active pleasures, and amusements, even formed some fresh friendships; but made, as you may well imagine,

no one the confidant of what was hour by hour the mainspring, the pulse, the very life of my being. Nor did this secrecy cost me the slightest effort. I was much too happy to care inwardly for any other intimacy than one; wherever my body, and even my mind might be, my heart, or rather my heart of hearts, was always in one place, and with one alone. Only for her sake I loved, and have always since loved all little rooms, black eunuchs, and red marks on doors."

"Go on," said Tāṇṭawee. Hermann continued.

"Twenty days passed thus. Meanwhile the preparations for Afsheen Beg's ill-sorted marriage were nearly completed; and nothing delayed its celebration but the imagined necessity of waiting for a lucky day; the wise Arab admonition of 'Take no notice of the days, lest they take notice of you,' forming

no part of the superstitious old Koord's system of belief. However, unpropitious planets,—or rather propitious ones, so far as I was concerned,—could not always be in the ascendant; and I perceived with alarm that Aḡ-Arslan's stay, and consequently that of his men, mine among the rest, at Diar-Bekr, would not much overlast the nuptials.

“I communicated my anxieties to Zahra'. She asked how long it might probably be before the wedding. ‘Ten days,’ I answered, ‘or fourteen at most.’

“‘Have you any news of Moḡarib the Riaḡee?’ was her next question. My answer was in the negative; for six days I had neither seen him nor heard anything about him. We both conjectured that his prolonged absence must be in some way connected with the Emeer Dagħfel's movements, who,—a new cause of disquiet,—might now be expected almost any day.

“She listened to my words, seated, and looking straight before her, calm as ever, but saying nothing. I felt sure that her silence covered whatever I most longed or feared to know; but could not then comprehend the strength of her resolution, and what gave her whole manner the composure I was unable to rival, even externally.

“‘Zahra’, my sister, speak,’ I urged. She remained silent. I cast myself at her feet, clasped them between my hands—and, more by look and gesture than by words, implored her pity.

“‘Not thus, my brother Ahmed, not thus,’ she said; ‘or is it that you doubt me?’

“‘Do I doubt you!’ was my answering exclamation; ‘ah Zahra!’ can you think that of me? It is no doubt that troubles me; but this uncertainty is hard to bear. You know that when the Beg leaves Diar-Bekr, I must

leave too ; and meanwhile the Emeer,—may God confound him,—will arrive ; and what hope then remains to me of seeing you again ? ”

“ ‘ A thousand Begg and a thousand Emeers, shall not separate between you and me, my dear brother.’ ” She raised her head as she spoke, and looked me straight in the face. “ But you must have patience ; the time is not come ; it—’ Suddenly she stopped, and a slight blush came over her features ; her hand moved towards her veil.

“ ‘ Let these things alone for the present,’ she added, regaining her former calm. There was a tone in her voice which while it reassured, warned me.

“ ‘ Are you displeased with me, sister ? ’ I said.

“ ‘ No,’ she replied, ‘ why should I, Ahmed ? But I fear your impetuosity ; be cautious. Believe me, there is danger in the air.’ ”

“I was about to ask her what her last words meant, but before I could frame my question, the door opened, and the black, Jowhar, whose fidelity I never had any reason to doubt, either then or afterwards, came hastily in. With a low voice he warned Zahra’ that such and such ones were about, and were likely to be soon coming that way ; if she wished to retire unperceived, she must make haste. He then went out and reclosed the door.

“We parted abruptly. My heart was heavy, my temperament in an excitement bordering on irritation ; her features, too, had no longer their wonted cheerfulness,—they were fixed and sad.

“‘Not to-morrow, my brother,’ said she, as I proposed the next day for our meeting ; ‘wait till I send. And, for God’s sake, be prudent,’ she added.

“‘I will be so, but do not let the time be too prolonged, sister, dearest Zahra’,’ I replied.

“‘Please God,’ she answered, with a faint smile. She left the room by one door, I by the other, each with a foreboding heaviness of heart, which, had we known more, would have been yet heavier. The sky, so bright of late, was now grey and overcast, its horizon was gloomier still; eyes less keen than those of lovers might have seen that a storm was at hand.

“Slowly I bent my way back to the busy town and streets; but before I had got well out of the gardens I noticed a figure, seemingly expectant of something or somebody; it was standing a little way round the corner of a cross path, half visible in the dark shadow of the boughs that overhung the wall. As I approached, it moved, and turned partly towards me; then abruptly retreated, and passed along into the side lane. I looked after it; and by a small green tassel hanging down be-

hind over the collar of the blue cloth jacket, more than by any other distinctive sign, I became aware that I had twice before already observed the same figure ; and each time while I was on my way to or from the Sheykh Asa'ad's quarters ; and that then, too, it appeared to be, as it were, concerned with my own movements. Could it be a spy ? and if so, who was the employer ?

“ More uneasy than before, I quickened my steps, and entering the town by a different gate from the usual one, made for a small *kaḥwah* in the northern quarter, where from time to time I had been accustomed to meet Moḥarib, in hopes of perhaps finding him now. No Moḥarib was there. This was the sixth day that I had seen nothing of him ; formerly his intercourse had been the mainstay to steady my mind amid the successive fluctuations of events ; now it failed me just when I most needed it.

“I returned to Afsheen Beg’s house, thinking there to find comparative rest of body and mind, for I felt strangely exhausted. But no; there, too, everything went against me. An unusual number of my fellow-horsemen were gathered together in the room that evening, and, as if on purpose to annoy me and increase my restlessness, their whole conversation turned on our approaching return to Jezeerah. I listened with disgust and impatience to the satisfaction that most,—indeed, all except myself,—expressed in the prospect of that event, and, in a fit of ill-timed perversity, took to contradicting them; I even went so far as to declare that I hated Jezeerah, and would make means to remain at Diar-Bekr.

“Maḵan Agha, who had remarked my ill-humour, and kindly tried to soothe or turn it off, stared in astonishment. ‘What is the

matter with you, this evening, Aḥmed Agha? Has any one been annoying you?' he asked.

" ' Upon my word, I think that Aḥmed is in love with some girl, hereabouts,' remarked, in the merest random jest, one of my companions.

" But I started like a guilty man suddenly detected; and then, on looking round, perceived for the first time, seated in the room, not exactly with our group, but close by, between us and the door, the very figure that I had observed that afternoon in the lane. The sight deprived me of what little presence of mind I still had left; and I hurriedly began a perfectly unnecessary and uncalled-for explanation; in a word I exemplified the proverb, 'The fool went to the tank to wash, and dirtied his feet with the mud.' "

" That is an Indian saying, I think," interposed Ṭanṭawee.

“Perhaps,” replied Hermann; “but I learnt it in the sook at Bagdad.” He then continued—

“Next day was a black one for me. New and gay dresses, bright ornaments, prancing horses, jovial companions, and ceaseless merry makings and amusements on a preliminary scale, shortly to culminate in the conventional follies of the marriage itself, surrounded me on every side, and irritated me like the pricking of thorns.

“For my greater mishap, while I was thus inwardly smarting all over, my master, Ak-Arslan, summoned me to his presence. Now, though I had never dared with him to say openly how hateful to me was the thought of our return-journey, yet the sulky expression evident on my face whenever the subject was brought forward, and my general awkwardness of manner and contradictory tone,

had before now more than once surprised and displeased him, as well they might, considering the free and generous good-will he had shown me from the outset.

“On the present occasion he wanted to make some inquiries of me about our horses, in the view of their readiness for the road to Jezeerah next week.

“I went to the divan, but instead of answering his queries with the respectful alacrity of a favoured retainer, my behaviour was more uncertain and moody, and my replies more capricious and unsatisfactory than usual. His brow darkened, and he sharply dismissed me from the apartment. And no wonder; for though not unamiable at heart, he was sensitive and suspicious, quickly annoyed, and, when annoyed, not equally quickly appeased.

“I had soon bitter cause to repent my

folly. Half an hour afterwards, while loitering in a most unenviable condition of mind near the door of the house, I saw a respectably dressed band, evidently of attendants, surrounding an elderly man on a sober well-fed horse, come up the street and approach our lodging-place. I looked, and in the elderly man, recognised Rustoom Beg, to whose garden I had, with unwise neglect, gone but once since my ill-starred visit; he alighted at the gate and entered. In his suite was the same *kaḥwahjee* whose eye had caught mine so unpleasantly when we were together on the kiosk-roof; and with him I saw a real cause of alarm, a man with a green tassel dangling down the back of his dark blue jacket. It was indeed the spy: who was, as I subsequently heard, a near relative of the *kaḥwahjee*'s, and who, my conscience told me, and told me true, had

on this occasion accompanied the other, not by chance, but to corroborate and deepen his accusations.

“What was the precise nature of the conversation that passed upstairs between Rustoom and Ak-Arslan Beg I never knew ; but it was a long one. I waited, unable to move, and tormented by the wildest fears, near the outer-gate ; till by the bustle within, visible through the divan windows, I became aware that the visitor had risen and was taking leave. Then mustering up my almost paralyzed strength, I betook myself off elsewhere, to be out of the way of Rustoom Beg and his attendants.

“Hither and thither I wandered the remainder of the day, miserable and restless ; sometimes looking, but in vain, for Moḥarib’s appearance ; sometimes in vague longing I strayed, uselessly and injudiciously enough,

towards the neighbourhood of Sheykh Asa'ad's garden, and the lane by the red-marked door. At evening I returned, and summoning up a desperate courage, went and stood before the Beg my master. He made no fresh remark, but his face expressed what his words did not, or rather what his silence did. I felt for certain that I was, if not discovered, at least accused; and I knew that with a nature like his an accusation was, in nine cases out of ten, tantamount to condemnation. Besides, my own soul told me that in this instance he was only too much in the right.

“After a wretched night, in which the little sleep I got was tormented by hideous and presaging dreams, I rose early, and strolled out, vague and purposeless, toward the open ground on the east of the town. The morning was fresh, and the air pleasantly cool to my fevered hands and face. I welcomed it, and walked slowly on.

“ When half-a-mile or so beyond the city-gates, I saw three horsemen coming towards me ; two of them very unlike anything I was accustomed to meet in these northerly countries : lean dark figures, with strongly marked features, scanty beards, long, black, and half-closed eyes ; their fore-arms and legs were scorched almost black with exposure to air and sun. They were dressed in long dingy shirts ; and over their shoulders hung brown cloaks, where the vestiges of red braid alone remained around the ragged edges ; on their heads were handkerchiefs of a dusky red, girt by twisted camels'-hair bands of alternate white and black. Each of them grasped a long, narrow-headed, quivering spear in his hand, and, besides the knife in his belt, wore a slightly crooked sword. Alongside of these two wild-looking figures rode a third : it was Moḥarib, dressed much

after the same fashion as his companions, and, like them, furnished with a spear. All three were mounted on lithe horses, beautifully formed, but lean, dusty, and jaded-seeming, as though from a journey of many days.

“At the moment they appeared, the sun rose golden bright over the blue ranges of Koor-distan, and while it shone on the rider’s backs dazzled full into my eyes; so that I did not recognise Moḥarib till he and the two others were close upon me. I was then about at once to have hailed him; but he, who had perceived me from a distance, was ready before he came up, with a glance and a gesture that repressed my salutation. So, taking no apparent notice, I walked on; much puzzled to think who his companions were, and why he was with them. But when alongside of me he raised his long spear for an instant, as though to ease his shoulder, and couched it across his horse with

the point in the direction of a path further on before me, out of which they had themselves turned into the high road. I followed the hint, and went as he indicated, very curious to learn what it all meant.

“I was not long left in uncertainty. Before ten minutes had elapsed I heard a sound of galloping behind me, and Moḥarib came up. Hurriedly he greeted me; and, without awaiting my questions, informed me that the two Arabs I had seen were of Benoo-Sheyban, and the Emeer Daghfel’s outriders; that the Emeer himself, with the main body of his men, would be here in seven days; that he himself had been all this while on the lookout for them, and had not been able to get back to Diar-Bekr sooner. All this he told me with Bedouin conciseness of words; and then asked how matters had gone during his absence—was there any appearance of suspicion abroad.

“Briefly as might be, I told him all. He listened attentively; but the habitual impassiveness of the Arab face permits no expression of the emotions of the moment. Without interruption or sign of surprise he heard me, till I had finished; then looked hard at me and divined my thoughts, which were indeed of rushing off immediately to the ḥaram and giving notice.

“‘For God’s sake, my little brother Aḥmed,’ said he, ‘do not go there to-day; return to the town; remain with your comrades, and keep as quiet as you can. I will arrange everything.’

“‘When shall I see you again?’ said I.

“‘I will meet you in the town, before night-fall,’ he answered. And added, ‘Do not go out alone to-day, outside the walls or among the gardens.’ And, turning his horse’s head, he cantered off.

“Left to myself, I retraced my steps to Afsheen Beg’s house; but found hardly any one of our band there. My master, Ak-Arslan, had been invited for the day to the country-house and garden of a friend three or four miles out of town, and most of his Koordish suite had accompanied him; they would not return till nightfall. Whether or not my absence was remarked, I did not hear then nor had I subsequently any opportunity of finding out.

“Not knowing how to pass the time, I wandered up and down the market-place wearily enough, yet on the whole calmer somehow than I had been for several days past. While at the door of a mosque in one of the streets I met the same kaḥwahjee of Rustoom Beg’s whom I now looked upon, and with the best possible reason, as my most dangerous enemy; he came up, and greeted me with an affected

frankness of manner to which I did my utmost to correspond. But when he advanced further to affectionate inquiries as to why my visits at the Beg his master's house had been so scarce of late, and even pushed his malice to talking about the alterations in the kiosk made in consequence of that too-memorable afternoon, I had great difficulty not to betray myself downright on the spot where we stood, by some fatal outburst. 'The pit is dug,' thought I, 'under my feet; better jump into it at once and have done than continue walking with useless caution on the rotten surface; sooner or later I must fall in.' However I restrained myself, and preserved my outward calm; though I daresay the evident constraint of my manner betrayed me hardly less effectually than the most outrageous behaviour could have done. He then bade me farewell, and mixed with the crowd.

“Twice in the course of that day I came across Moḥarib, who seemed to be everywhere in the streets; but each time he gave me no mark of recognition. I therefore had nothing for it but to follow his example, and suppress my impatience, now almost past bearing. At last, just after sunset, he again appeared in sight, and this time evidently with tidings to communicate. They were brief, but important. Hardly allowing me space to return his concise greeting, he said, ‘I come from her, your sister; she salutes you.’ Then pointing upwards to the moon, which now, a pale oval-shaped disk, hung high in the eastward heaven, for it was her tenth night, he added, ‘When that is near setting, meet me in the lane, by the door.’ And, without any other explanation, he passed on and left me.

“The hour he had implied was not much after midnight. I remained out in a ḵaḥwah

of the quarter as late as I dared, in order to give the Beg my master and my comrades time to have returned from their merry-makings and settled themselves to rest; and then resought my customary night-lodgings in Afsheen Beg's hospitable dwelling. When I reached it all was quiet; every one had lain down long before. I too spread my carpet, and, throwing myself on it, feigned to sleep; for real sleep, was of course out of the question for me under such circumstances. Several of us were lodged together in a large plastered room on the ground floor; and there I lay wakeful enough for four long hours, listening to my comrades, who were snoring beside me as only Koordes can snore after a heavy supper; every one of them had been for days past preparing by an introductory course of gormandizing for the anticipated delights of the wedding carousals.

“The night was warm, the air still; and the rays of the declining moon shone almost as mellow as sunset beams through two small windows pierced in the side-wall of the apartment above our heads. Yet as I rose from my wakeful bed, I put on a cloak, not for protection against chill, but to hide the gleam of the arms which I carried about me; and to the service-condition of which I had given a careful look that evening before lying down. Then softly, softly, I left the room, and passed bare-foot and on tiptoe under the vaulted entrance through the large outer gate; the servants with a negligence not uncommon in a household where a weak good-natured old man is at the head, had left it unbolted. When fairly outside I put on my boots; and took the road I had so often trodden by day.

“No one was stirring on my way; no living form was to be seen; nor did I hear any

sound except the occasional plashing of some small watercourse, and the wailing cry of the jackals prowling about the fields outside the walls : all else was still as death. The sinking moonlight cast a few long yellow streaks across the dust, but in most places dark shadow had overspread the road. On I went, like one half asleep, so overpowered was I by past anxiety, expectation, and the hushed night ; till, at the corner of the lane, under Sheykh Asa'ad's enclosure, I found Moḥarib in waiting. With an 'all's well,' he bade me hail, and said, 'Go you there,' indicating a spot on the stone-strewn piece of ground by the path, already in deep shade, 'and wait without stirring.'

"I obeyed like a child without reply.

"Seated on the ground I kept my eyes fixed on the wall of the ḥaram opposite. The lower part of the building, along with the

trees that clustered beside it, were now one mass of darkness ; but the almost level light of the moon still caught on the upper storey, and brought out the roof in a distinct pale line against the deep pure sky, where the larger stars alone were visible. The moon herself, large and orange-coloured, seemed to rest awhile on the brow of a black hill, behind which she must soon disappear.

“ I had not waited long when I heard a voice,—it was Moḥarib’s. Half ensconced behind the shelter of an earth-mound not far from the farther or outermost corner of the ḥaram buildings, he had turned his face towards them, and in a low but very distinct voice,—almost too distinct, I thought, amid the intense stillness around,—he thus sang :—

“ ‘ Guide o’er the drear and desert ways,
Pass by the hills where foemen rove,
By heath and heather, banks and braes,
To greet the vale where dwells my love.

Bid her,—yet bid her not,—entreat
A thought, a memory of the past,
For one whose heaven was at her feet ;
His more than heaven, that would not last.’

“ He paused ; there was no answer, nor indication of any. Then he resumed, on a somewhat higher key—

“ ‘ Behind the sand-hills sinks the moon,
The lengthening shadows hurry on ;
Hid lies the vale,—but all too soon,
Both night and darkness will be gone.
Abide, abide, ye fleeting hours ;
What day denies let night restore.
Ours be the dell, the darkness ours ;
Thou, too, be mine, once more, once more ! ’

“ Before the singer had half finished these verses, and just as the upper part of the moon’s disk was about to vanish below the hill-top, I saw a female figure, draped in a robe of some dark colour from head to foot, emerge on the haram roof, and approach its foremost edge. My eye could scarcely dis-

tinguish the form ; but, quicker than my eye, my heart recognised Zahra'. She stood near the parapet for a short space, facing the direction where I was, and waited motionless till the song was over. She then lifted her hand, and pointed towards a distant spot ; I could perceive that Moḥarib also had risen from his place, and made some sign in answer,—what, however, I could not make out for the shadow, which by this time had overspread everything. Immediately afterwards the figure left the roof.

“Moḥarib came up to where I was, and, taking me by the hand, led me in silence across the maize-field to the broken ground where he and I had before sat and conversed together in the torrent-bed. Once more we sat down on its pebbles ; a deep revulsion of feeling came over me,—my heart was like to burst. A faint sheen still glimmered over

where the moon had set in the western sky ; else the only light was that of the innumerable stars,—some of them were reflected in the water at our feet. We waited both of us without speaking ; had I tried, I could not have uttered a word.

“ A few minutes passed thus ; they could have been only a few, but I held no count of time, I had even no distinct thought ; only it seemed to me that we were there spell-bound by some strange enchantment, that had begun I knew not how or when, and would hold us thus unbroken for how long I knew not either. At last I was roused to life by a slight rustle coming through the maize ; then followed a sound as of trodden pebbles, and two forms stood by us. Amid the half-transparent darkness of the summer night I recognized in them Zahra' herself, and with her the Arab serving-maid, Moħarib's kinswoman ; each was closely

wrapped up in a long black veil that concealed every feature.

“ Approaching, Zahra’ saluted us ; I stretched out my hand in silence, for my voice was choked. We then,—she and I,—took our place side by side on the bank of stones ; Moḥarib and the maid remained standing near, till Zahra’ bade them sit down, which they did. For some time no one spoke.

“ Zahra’ was the first to break the silence. In a low voice,—‘ I have heard all this afternoon, Aḥmed,’ said she, addressing herself to me. ‘ I was unwilling to speak sooner, but for some days I had feared the eye of the envious and the watcher ; that which I feared has indeed come to pass. But they shall not have their will :—cheer up, my brother.’

“ ‘ How can I cheer up,’ I exclaimed, ‘ when you are in danger ? my life ! my soul ! For me, enough if I die for your safety ; but what

can be done? Tell me at once, and I will do it; but, O my sister! do not keep me in suspense; I am ready for everything.'

"'It is not my danger that matters; it is yours,' she answered. 'For me I am safe, at least for the present; no one either within doors or without will dare to avow suspicion regarding me; much less to embody their suspicions in act; besides, the expected arrival of my cousin the Emeer, if nothing else, will suffice to put all gossip to silence where I am concerned. But you, my poor brother!—they will not be so scrupulous about you; your life is every moment at the mercy of those who would think as little of taking it as they would of killing a quail or a partridge; it is for you I fear.'

"'Let them try,' I replied. 'I have a right arm and a dagger; and these have been too much for the like of any enemies hereabouts

before now.' As I spoke, I instinctively drew aside my cloak, and showed the weapons I wore.

"Gently she laid her hand on my shoulder. 'You are brave, my brother; I know it; were it a question of fair fighting I should be little alarmed about you. But what use would your courage be, or your dagger and pistols either, against a shot from behind a bush, a stab in the back, or a poisoned draught. Be wise, and listen to me; it is the only chance for your life, and for mine; for, Aḥmed, if you die I will not survive you by half-an-hour,' she added in an under tone.

"'What would you have me do, dearest?' I asked; 'quit Diar-Bekr? No; that I cannot while you are here: and where should I go, leaving you behind? Ah Zahra'! not that; tell me anything but separation from you, and I will obey; were it to walk through fire for your sake.'

“‘Softly, brother,’ she replied. ‘All I want of you is this; do not return, by night or by day, to this place or the house, nor even to this side of the town and gardens; do not even form a wish to see me again here in Diar-Bekr; it cannot be. Our next meeting will soon come, please God, but it must be far away from hence, in the south. When the Beg your master sets out to return to Jezeerah, go you along with him like the rest of his followers. On the second or third day of the journey Moḥarib will fall in with you; and he will show you where to go and how to find me.’

“‘And the Emeer Daghfel?’ I interposed.

“‘Never mind the Emeer Daghfel,’ she said almost impatiently; then laughed. ‘I am more than a match,’ she continued, ‘for the Emeer my cousin, he and all the clan. Have not I promised you before? Only do you act as I

now tell you, and everything, please God, will be well.'

"I promised to obey her directions in every respect; intoxicated by the hope her words gave me, by the tone of her voice, by the felt presence of her beauty, by the full draught of love avowed and answered, she might have dictated whatever she chose; had my heart's blood been the price then and there, I should have consented. Yet I would fain have asked in return some fuller explanation of the when and the how of our next meeting; but whether it was her own maidenly reserve, or whether she distrusted my prudence, I do not know—on this subject her lips were sealed.

"Then without a word more we read each the other's thoughts; and abandoning the anxious future and whatever could bring fear, disquiet, or pain, we turned our whole soul and converse for one hour,—one last hour,—to love

and happiness, now in past remembrance, now in the fulness of the present. An hour of perfect life as of perfect love, an hour in which, though after long barren years I yet live, she yet lives to me and loves ; an hour of paradise ; a last glad gleam before the darkness of the storm closed in around us.

“Of brightest hues the fading leaf;
The latest flower the sweetest;
The happiest hour is nearest grief,
The dearest joys the fleetest.”

“Suddenly a bright star leaped up over the eastern mountain-range ; it was the star of morning. Zahra’ saw and shivered. ‘I never hated that star till now,’ she said ; ‘may God forgive you and me.’ Moḥarib had risen,—he and the maid had long since kept silence. ‘The time is short, the morning breaks,’—while he spoke the cool breeze smote us ;—enough ;—I will say no more of that moment ; as I held her in my arms I thought it the

sweetest, as we loosed our embrace, the bitterest of my life. I was mistaken; there were bitterer yet in store.

“It was over now; she was gone; the uncertain gloom had taken her veiled form and that of her maid-servant into its depths: and a quarter of an hour later Moḥarib and I were slowly leaving the scene of all that joy, all that pain, under the grey twilight of the rapidly rising dawn. We made a wide circuit, going half round the town on a track entirely unconnected with that by which I had come. As we walked, Moḥarib reiterated the advice already given me by Zahra’, to be quiet and circumspect; and at the same time he endeavoured to quiet my apprehensions regarding the consequences of the Emeer Daghfel’s arrival.

“‘The sheykh’s daughter is an Afreet,’¹

¹ This word, denoting a powerful and cunning spirit,

she will manage to have the nuptial celebrations put off under one pretext or another,' he said, 'till the caravan shall reach Nejd. Nejd is far away; the way thither is long; and you and I will cross their track before they pass the limits of Zobeyr.'¹

"He then went on to give me minute directions regarding my own share in the accomplishment of the scheme. I was to bide my time in Diar-Bekr, keeping as much as possible within the walls of the town, neither shunning nor attracting observation; but carefully avoiding all solitary walks among the gardens or near the river, particularly in the neighbourhood which we had just left. 'Remember, it is her honour, not your life

is often used by Arabs regarding a clever person with a complimentary signification, as here.

¹ A small town on the north-Arab frontier, not far from Basrah.

only, that is at stake,' he added. 'As you value them both, attempt nothing further so long as you are in this place, come what may.'

" 'When Aḳ-Arslan sets out for Jezeerah,' he continued, 'do you set out too along with him, like the rest of his suite. The second day, before sunset, I will cross your road, as if by accident, and at some distance. If then I say nothing, and seemingly take no notice of you or of any one else, understand that all goes well; if otherwise, I will find means of telling you. That same night, during the halt for rest, do you slip quietly away from among your companions, the earlier the better; and make your way, keeping between west and south, till you reach the village of Ra's-el-'Eyn,¹ in the desert. There, if not sooner on the way to it, I will join you;—the rest we will

¹ A small Arab hamlet, about thirty miles distant from Mardeen, in the Mesopotamian plain.

arrange afterwards. We shall have to fight, though, before all is done,' he added.

"My heart bounded with joy at the thought. To prove my love by deeds, was the very thing I most longed for; had he told me that to reach the loved one I must pass a river broad as the Nile in autumn, and filled from brim to brim with fire instead of water, the prospect would have rendered me only the more eager to set out on my quest.

"But different things were in store; man contrives, and God ordains.¹ When we came under the city wall, near the narrow-arched gate on the north side, Moḥarib left me, with the promise of meeting me again in the course of the next day; while I, alone, but no longer downcast as before, continued my way over the rough pavement to Afsheen Beg's house. The sun was now up; everybody was stirring;

¹ Arab proverb.

and on entering the court-yard I found it full of life and bustle; some of the Koordes were grooming, others feeding their horses; others again talking and smoking between times. No one gave signs of having noticed my prolonged absence; in the holiday life we were then leading, each one, within certain limits, pursued his own occupations or pleasures much as he chose; and questions were seldom asked. Only Mağan Agha, who was leaving the place at the moment I came into it, met me with a serious expression unusual on his merry face, and as he returned my morning greeting, whispered, 'Have a care.'

"Indoors several of my comrades were at work on a large bowl of clotted milk, into which small green cucumbers had been liberally sliced; seeing me approach, they widened their circle, and invited me to join in a share. I sat down in the offered gap, glad to still by a

copious meal the craving emptiness that followed on the watching and over-excitement of the night ; and began a good breakfast.

“ Before, however, this task was well accomplished, a message came from my master the Beg, summoning me to the divan. My heart,—which had so lately almost recovered its calmer measure,—now again beat rapidly. Could some spy, some traitor, have revealed the night’s adventure ? and was the crisis of my fate indeed come ? It had come ; though not precisely in the manner, nor with the immediate crash, that my fears anticipated.

“ Doing violence to my suddenly diminished appetite, I finished to the best of my ability my share of the cooling meal ; washed my hands and face, arranged my dress, and, with a mind disposed to meet and brave the worst, went upstairs to the square many-windowed room where Aḳ-Arslan awaited me. I found

him at his ease on the divan, in a loose morning dress, with one of his writers and a few acquaintances around him. His countenance was singularly open, his manner cheerful : it was, had I known it, the cheerfulness of the tiger when he sees his prey secure within the reach of his spring.

“ Calling me to him, he threw down on the cushion beside him a large sealed letter. ‘ Take this, Ahmed Agha,’ said he, ‘ and mount, without a moment’s delay, for Mardeen. There you must give the letter to my uncle, Zenkee Agha, who lives in the castle ; take his answer, and be back post-haste. Afsheen Beg’s wedding,—may good fortune attend it,—is fixed for Thursday, and you must be here again in time for it.’

“ I picked up the letter, put it to my forehead, then into my breast, and was about to leave the room. He called after me,—

‘Ahmed.’ I stopped. ‘Mind,’ said he, ‘you deliver the letter to Zenkee Agha yourself; do not entrust it to any one else. Quickly, quickly: go, under God’s guard.’ ‘On my head,’¹ I answered, and went out. In the hurry of the moment, and the excitement of unexpected escape, as I thought, from a danger anticipated as certain, I did not remark that he had neither assigned me a companion for the road, nor even hinted at any; but the idea occurred unpleasantly to me as I quickly descended the stairs with the letter in my keeping.

“Yet after all, thought I, no occurrence could be more natural than this; one or other of us was being continually employed on errands of this sort, and often alone.

¹ A customary form of speech, implying that he who receives the order is ready to vouch for its fulfilment with his life.

Ak-Arslan had many friends, allies of intrigue, and correspondences in the country all round, and was daily sending or receiving messages. Still, it struck me as a singular, and hardly an agreeable coincidence, that I, who had for some time past been generally regarded as one of the more personal and immediate attendants of the Beg's, and exempt from distant or courier work, should have it now abruptly thrust upon me; and that precisely at such a time, under such circumstances. It might be only the result of his dissatisfaction at my late waywardness, and of the wish to have a discontented face less frequently in his sight. But it might also well be,—I could not help saying to myself,—a preconcerted design between my master and Rustoom Beg,—perhaps the Sheykh Asa'ad also,—to get me out of the way, or, indeed, to get rid of me altogether.

“Anyhow, it would be well for me to be provided against emergencies. So, when once on the ground-floor pavement, I went round to an out-of-the-way place, appropriated by myself for the purpose on my arrival four weeks since, before the dwelling became, as it now was, overcrowded, where stood the box, painted light green, and studded with brass nails, in which my valuables were locked up. I opened it; at top lay, neatly folded, clothes, shirts, handkerchiefs; underneath were my more costly possessions,—a choice suit of arms, inlaid with gold, some ornaments, a bottle of scent, a sandal-wood string of beads from Mecca, and, more jealously concealed than the rest, a girdle, in which sixty pieces of gold had been sewn up.

“Having well assured myself that no eye watched me, and screening my actions as well as I could behind a corner of the wall, for

there was no door, I stripped myself, fastened the girdle tight over the skin round my waist, and then dressed again over it in my best and strongest clothes ; put the beads in my pocket, and thrust my certificate of freedom¹ between my skull-cap and the new tarboosh² which I donned for the occasion. Then I secured in my belt,—not the one pistol only that I ordinarily carried about me,—but two taken from out of the chest, long-barrelled, primed, and loaded ; besides a heavy, brightly-furnished carbine, also loaded, which I slung over my shoulder, and a particularly long and sharp knife in my girdle. Cramming back my older and less valuable chattels into the

¹ The “Azad-Kaghad,” given to a slave on obtaining his liberty ; it is signed by his master, and countersigned by a magistrate and witnesses.

² The red cap, ordinarily surmounted by a blue tassel, common in the East ; it is also often called “fez.”

chest, I relocked it, and issued forth into the courtyard to see after my horse.

“ ‘Why, what preparations are you making, Ahmed?’ remarked one of my fellow-horsemen,—a Yezeedee,¹ I believe. ‘How gaily you are got up!’

“ I said something, not very coherent, about the wedding.

“ ‘That’s Thursday, and to-day is Monday,’ rejoined the other. ‘Why don’t you keep your fine clothes for the marriage day? Besides, the journey you are now for is hardly more than a good day’s ride.’

“ The man’s ugly squint, — he always squinted,—had this morning something especially ominous in it; besides, thought I, how does he come to be already so well informed about my route and errand? I

¹ See Layard’s “Nineveh.” The Yezeedees are a remnant of the old Manichæan stock.

muttered an indistinct reply about the time of the year, and the loneliness of the road; then wished that I had said nothing, and passed on, with my suspicions now more awake than ever, to see after the condition of my riding-gear and my horse. Both were in excellent order. Tightening the girths, I leapt into the saddle, and, without a word of adieu to any one, rode out of the courtyard. Streets, market-place, and town-gates were soon behind me,—I hardly noticed them as I passed,—and in a few minutes more I had quitted Diar-Bekr, little thinking that I should never see it again.

“Mounted on a powerful three-quarters blood-horse, which I had purchased ten days before with the spare proceeds of my master’s liberality, in the market of Diar-Bekr, fine in the muzzle, arched in the neck, light in the shoulder, long in the back, full in the loins and

quarter, iron-grey in colour, with plenty of gold in my girdle, gay clothes, and serviceable weapons, Ak-Arslan's letter in my pocket, I should have seemed to any observer by the wayside a most unlikely person for sorrow or mishap. A bright sky above me, I passed rapidly on by house and inclosure, garden and orchard, familiar objects, to all which I was unconsciously bidding an absolute farewell, till I reached the plain.

"I was now on the high-road between the summer-dried fields, with the thick dust beneath my horse's hoofs, and the burning sun in his face and mine. By this time, I had lapsed into a strange dreamy state of mind, without distinct remembrance, idea, or plan; the events of the morning, of the night, of the preceding days, with all the scenes they had presented and the emotions they had excited, seemed almost too distant for remembrance, or came

before me flat, picture-like, and lifeless ; I tried to rouse myself and realize them, but could not. The surface of my thoughts, so agitated before into a thousand waves, now lay in an unnatural calm ; stilled as it were by the advance of a huge though unseen swell, that smoothed and absorbed into itself, while about to overwhelm and bury all. This was, indeed, no other than the unexplained presentiment of great misfortune near at hand, of a new and disastrous phase of life. I felt it to be such ; yet I could not shape the vague notion into form, nor assign its why and wherefore.

“I had ridden thus for an hour and more ; noon was drawing on ; and far or near hardly a soul was in sight. But as I was leaning half-drowsily over my saddle, I suddenly heard my own name called out. The voice sounded close to my ear, perfectly distinct, sharp and shrill ; it was different from any voice that I

ever heard before, or, once alone excepted, since ;—I pray God that I may never hear it again. Starting I looked around, before, behind. No one was near me on the road nor anywhere else within human call. I quieted myself, and tried to dismiss the circumstance from my mind, as merely the result of a sleepless night and an excited imagination, combined perhaps with the heat of the road. Then, on the far edge of the visible horizon, two miles or so distant to my right, I discerned three mounted figures that appeared to be coming round from a wide circuit, and hastening on in the same direction with myself, as though intending to outstrip me. Soon afterwards a rising ground hid them from my view, and they did not again appear.

“There were troubles in the country at large ; the regular government was relaxed, or, rather, existed only in name ; every man was

law or un-law for himself. Several of the innumerable petty chieftains who divide Koor-distan were at feud with each other; and every day cattle and sheep were being carried off, now by Beg this, now by Agha that; now and then a man was shot or, though more rarely, stabbed.

“I was aware of this, and had it partly in view when I armed myself for my solitary ride; thinking that, even treachery and assassination apart, I might not improbably fall in with troublesome customers, whose violence would be best prevented or, if not, requited by a good provision of powder and steel. Hence I was not wholly taken by surprise by what happened that afternoon shortly after I had entered the long-winding valley through which the road runs south-east from Diar-Bekr.

“The path I followed led alongside of a little ravine, or, better, an abrupt depression,

filled up with willow, alder, and brushwood; on the other hand, that is the right, the rock hemmed me in. The ground was rough and stony, and I had allowed my horse to go leisurely, picking his way among its inequalities, when all at once, without sign or warning, two shots were fired at me almost pointblank out of the brushwood: one grazed my arm; the other went altogether wide. Near as the aim was, I cannot up to the present day imagine how the bullets missed my body. The reports echoed wide and loud; but through them I clearly distinguished a third sound also,—that of a trigger snapped, and a flash in the pan.

“Without waiting to think of numbers or danger, I turned my startled horse’s head towards the thick leafage from which the light-blue smoke was still curling up, intending to discover who my cowardly assailants were, and to punish their attempt. The long-endured

strain of anxiety and passion had aroused in me a reckless ferocity ready to break forth on occasion given; though of this I was not myself yet fully aware. What next might have happened I cannot tell: little good to me most likely, the odds considered. But my time was not yet come; for at that instant an armed band of travellers, men of Moşool by their dress, appeared winding up the valley towards us; they had heard the noise of firearms, and shouted out loudly to me when they saw me. This incident probably saved my life; for the would-be assassins, alarmed at this unlooked-for reinforcement, hid themselves deep in the ravine, and, doubtless waited a fitter opportunity.

“That which had at first been mere suspicion now became for me absolute certainty; a plot had been laid to get me alone out of Diar-Bekr, and then to murder me on the road. More

I could not then give myself time to examine or conjecture ; the first thing to be done, and done without the loss of a moment, was to change my route, and so baffle the liers-in-wait, whoever they were. So, hardly waiting till the Moşool band, after brief interchange of inquiry and greeting, had passed on, I turned sharp out of the regular high-road into a side-track that led off amid a labyrinth of wooded hills, broken here and there into little rocky ledges, on the right. Among these I threaded narrow thicket-girded paths, pushing my way with difficulty through thwarting branch and bough, now climbing, now descending, by countless slopes and valleys, each puzzling like the preceding one, till I was sure that I must have put a long distance between the high-road and myself, and had moreover entirely lost my way."

"Had I been you, I should not have been

over-anxious to find it again," interrupted Tāntawee. "What, in God's name, could have possessed you to want to go on for Mardeen after all that had happened? Did you wish to give your kind friends the chance of another shot? or was all the world for you in the Karajah Dagħ and the Tigris valley, that you must needs remain within their limits to be murdered at leisure?"

"True," answered Hermann; "and now that it is long over, and I am sitting here quietly on the ship's deck, I can myself see clearly what I ought then to have done. But I had been for a good while in the service of Aḳ-Arslan, and, though I could not otherwise than suspect him of a hand in the ambush laid for me, I had it not yet in me to renounce his bidding. Zahra' too was still in Diar-Bekr: and how so suddenly put an absolute severance between me and the place

that held her? Ties continue to fetter, even when every strand that wove them has been broken across; and I was young, and a stranger; and many strands, ay, Tāntawee, and the strongest of them all, yet bound me. Like a sheep to the slaughter I went on, head downwards, with two only thoughts for guides: one to reach Mardeen, deliver my message, and return to Diar-Bekr with all possible speed; the other to avoid the high-roads and ordinary paths of the journey."

"In a word, you had lost your head," subjoined his friend. "Well; much allowance must be made for a lover; but pray act more discreetly in our coming campaign, or it will go hard with your men and you. But continue your story."

Hermann resumed.

"While I wandered thus, uncertain of the very points of the compass, I met a peasant

carrying a faggot of wood; on seeing me, armed and fierce-looking, he turned in fright, and began running away. I called to him; reassured him; and when he had recovered his wits enough to understand me, asked him my way to the nearest village in the direction of Mardeen. He pointed out to me a bridle-path leading to a large hamlet, Beydar he called it, where, said he, I could find food and forage for myself and my horse, and lodging for the night. The place itself was three hours' distance from where I then was.

“Pressing forward in the direction he indicated, I reached the low flat-roofed dwellings and mud walls of Beydar a little after sunset. In the village there resided an Agha, 'Omar by name, a Koorde, of course. He was a native of the locality, and proprietor of the lands around it. His large, straggling house, with its patchy plaster, numerous windows,

and wide open entrance, attracted my notice. Without ceremony I rode into the dirty court, half-full of cattle driven in for the evening, and dismounted.

“The Agha received me hospitably; he was a youngish man, thick-set and red-faced. This latter quality was, I soon discovered, due in great measure to the freedom with which he habitually indulged in spirituous liquors, more especially raķee. Not that he was wholly singular in this respect, for all the inhabitants of these parts, Mahometans scarcely less than unbelievers, are given to strong drink; the Koordes more than any. Few in fact abstain wholly, though the great number keep, at ordinary times at least, from gross excess. But within 'Omar Agha's walls, it was like master like man. Every one, friends, acquaintance, retainers, servants, slaves, were habitual drunkards. Bottles stood on the shelves, and

glasses were filled and emptied, from morning till night. It was the rule of the place, and who did not like it might go elsewhere. On drunkenness followed its ordinary consequences; and a Bagdadee Be-lillah¹ himself might have been startled and disgusted by the debauchery that reigned in talk and deed too throughout the establishment. I myself, though not over-scrupulous on many points,"—"I rather think not," interjected Tāntāwee—"was so here; besides, I was just then in no humour for amusements of that kind.

"However all made me welcome; few questions were asked of my coming and going; it was 'Hail, fellow; well met;' and, 'let us enjoy the hour.' There was no lack of good fare; meat was plenty, and drink more so; and the boisterous gaiety of the Agha's

¹ A "ne'er-do-well," or "son of Belial."

men seemed to be only increased by the anxious expression which they observed on my face, and wished to dispel. A couple of bottles of coarse but fiery raḳee were speedily disposed of by the party; more followed. I, harassed by my thoughts, excited by the noise around me, determined to be merry also for an hour or two at any price. I took my share largely. The liquor acted even more than it would otherwise have done on my worn brain and wearied frame; and I soon succeeded in becoming to the full as noisy as the rest, only less good-humoured.

“The night in these regions, for the village stood high up among the mountains, was cool in spite of summer; we lighted a fire, and sat round it drinking for more than an hour. Of a sudden a quarrel arose between myself and a young Koorde, one of 'Omar Agha's retainers, of about my own age; the beginning

of it was a coarse joke of his, ill-taken on my part. This led to high words and angry gestures; followed by knives drawn on either side, thrusts and slashes. My new dress was cut and torn in more than one place; but my antagonist got the worst of it, for a blow of my khanjar¹ laid his smooth cheek open from temple to jaw, and covered him with blood.

“Fortunately the soberer ones of the party interfered, otherwise it would have fared ill with me; for three tall grizzly-bearded Koordes had already unsheathed their knives and rushed on me in a body to avenge the fate of their relative, who, thrown backward by the force of my blow across the bench where we had been seated, now lay stunned and bleeding on the floor. But with those who were the least drunk, or who had no

¹ Dagger.

kinsmanly interest in the fray, the titles of stranger and guest had not wholly lost their value even by this provocation; and more gathered to my defence than to my attack. When the first hubbub was over, we picked up the wounded man, and washed the blood from his head and face; the cold water soon brought him to himself. His comrades banded up the cut, which, however unsightly, was not deep or dangerous. I was heartily sorry for what I had done, and made many excuses, which were seemingly well received, not only by the young fellow himself, but even by his more surly relations. After a few minutes nothing more was said on the matter; but the conviviality of the night was at an end, and before long we were all laid down, I with the others, to sleep."

"Did the Agha know of the affair?" asked Tanṭawee.

“At the time he certainly did not,” answered Hermann, “for he had gone out early in the evening to another house, where he had an appointment ; but he must have heard enough of it later on, considering the consequences.”

“And what were they?”

“Bad ones ; you shall hear,” said Hermann ; and continued,—

“After a short and sound sleep, I rose next morning early, and was in the saddle by sunrise, intending to reach Mardeen, which was still several hours distant, about noon. The path pointed out to me by the villagers, led downwards for some miles, gradually descending among rock, hill, and wood, till it emerged, according to their account, on the great plain west of Mardeen, in view of the town and fortress.

“However, long before I had got clear of the broken forest-covered ground, indeed when

I could not have made more than three or four miles distance from my resting-place of the night, two Koordes, foster-brothers of the young man whom I had wounded, started abruptly out from behind a clump of brush-wood alongside of the way. One of them, leaping up at me, attempted to drag me off my horse, while the other cut furiously at me with a sword. But I was well armed,—much better than my assailants; and though, after the peace-makings of the evening before I had not anticipated this ambushade in particular, I was so far prepared against similar occurrences, that I was not taken wholly by surprise. Before the swordsman had found time to deal me an effectual blow with his clumsy weapon, I had drawn a pistol from my belt, and twisting round, shot the fellow who was grappling me through the body. He dropped groaning; the other turned and fled.

“The sight of the dying man ; his look of despairing rage at me as he lay there convulsed on the grass ; the short stifled gasp that, parting, left his features fixed in the changeless distortion of death ; the dark blood trickling out to a distance from under heather and thyme ; the consciousness that I had with my own hand killed a man with whom I had been, not twelve hours before, seated at the same table, eating out of the same dish, drinking out of the same glass ; the certainty too that I had by the act incurred the blood-revenge of a whole family and clan at arms,—all these worked on me in an overpowering manner, and utterly unnerved me. I felt myself guilty,—though, in truth, I was not so except in part,—of the first quarrel which had brought on the whole affair ; guilty also of the death, which, rightly considered, I had only caused in fair self-defence ; guilty of

whatever I was, and whatever I was not. Besides the waywardness, the impatience, the ill-humour, the over-excitement, the whole element in which I had been living and indulging myself for so many days past had, instead of strengthening, really weakened my character, by the unhealthy stimulus which they at first conferred. They were now gone, and in a moment the entire reaction came over me.

“I dismounted; stooped down by the body, took it by one arm, lifted it a little, let it fall back again. All was of no use: life had left it. Hastily then I tore down some handfuls of leaves and twigs, and covered the corpse; but my bitter self-reproach would not be covered from me. I knew myself to be, in the eyes of all, near or far, a convicted criminal, both for what I had done and what I had not done. To return to Diar-Bekr, and there face

my master, my comrades, my acquaintance, Moḥarib, Zahra' herself, now seemed to me an impossible thing. A curse was on me; fly I must; and my flight instinctively,—for till the first glimpse of the open plain a full hour later aroused me to such considerations, I made no account of the why and wherefore,—took the direction of Mardeen.

“A dreary ride it was, full of anxiety and remorse, full of the worst misgivings, the apprehension of countless evils and dangers, some real, some imaginary, but figured as real; and myself accountable for all. A corpse in the grass, a broken heart in the dwelling, anger, shame, hatred, confusion, filled up my backward view; before, everything was doubtful, perilous, and dark. Now, too, returned to my memory the happiness known so lately at Diar-Bekr: that garden, that room, that torrent bed, those meetings,

those looks, those words, the warmth of her hand in mine, the touch of her cheek; but all wore a different aspect, all was gloom and wormwood to my soul. I condemned myself for a seducer and a villain; yet had any one questioned me in what I was a villain or a seducer, I should have been at a loss for a reasonable answer. The sky was one leaden cloud-vault above; there was no star to guide or cheer me in sight.

“But worst of all to bear was the thought of the barrier that my own acts, for mine they were, had raised between my love and myself; a barrier over which I could then see no passing. I saw her,—how near yet how far!—bravely keeping her own against parents, friends, relatives, suitor; hemmed in on every side by difficulties, pressed by every motive of affection, modesty, fear, by persuasion, by threats, by authority, by force perhaps; and

amid these faithful to her given word, and waiting night after night, day after day, waiting vainly for my re-appearance, and the fulfilment of my plighted promise,—in vain, in vain! This thought was torment indeed; hell, did hell exist, could have no worse; for in the imagined hell of story there would be no love, and love has cunning torments unknown to any but himself in any world. And thus they tortured me :—

“I think of those I left behind,
Not those I see before me;
A sudden pang contracts my mind,
A shadow darkens o’er me.
Of love unquited, left to wait
Far off, a chance returning;
Drear road, and shadow-haunted gate,
And hopeless hopes of yearning.

“This have I found life’s saddest curse,
That love is still unequal,
To take the better, give the worse,
With sundrance in the sequel.
And poise the scales, as poise we try,
The balance will not even;—

Oh, hangs it ever more awry,
Or comes it straight in heaven ?”

Having recited these verses, Hermann covered his face with his hand, and remained silent.

“A pitiable case yours was indeed,” observed Tanṭawee; “but, honestly, I cannot call it quite undeserved. You were, to speak the plain truth, only reaping what you yourself had sown. My dear Aḥmed, intrigues like those which you had then been pursuing with such intemperate eagerness,—excuse me, but I am only using your own words,—could hardly have a different result; and, boy though you were, you knew, or ought to have known, that you and she too were playing with edge-tools of a particularly dangerous description. At best you were wasting time and energy that might have been more usefully employed; besides putting your own hands, and those of your

fellow-players, in imminent risk of very ugly cuts."

Hermann said nothing; Tanṭawee went on.

"What right, again, had you, Aḥmed, to step in between a girl and her family, a betrothed girl too, and you a stranger and a dependant on others; and to encourage her in meetings and schemes which placed her every moment on the brink of dishonour, or worse? She, indeed, seems to me, to have been, if not better principled, at any rate wiser than you, and to have known where to stop, or rather to make you stop. I honour her for it. But as for you, you were simply a young pleasure-hunting scamp, determined on the gratification of your fancies, lawful or unlawful, with all their consequences; likely enough anyhow to be worse for her than for you."

"You are too hard on us both," at last answered Hermann, roused, as his friend

had intended he should be, into self-defence. “Neither father nor family have, in my opinion, a right absolutely to dictate a girl’s marriage choice, independent of her will; and a betrothal, however formal, if made without consent, may assuredly be broken off without wrong. And as for the lawfulness of love such as ours, I hold that what God Himself causes cannot be unlawful. She was free, and so was I; God willed it, and we loved. In very truth, and on whatever supposition you take it, neither my love nor hers deserves blame, unless it be for the rashness of bringing ourselves within the compass of penalties which, like the laws that imposed them, might in case like ours command fear, but never obligation or respect.

“However, if you will know our thoughts, neither she nor I troubled ourselves much about these things; we took the present as we found it; and made of what seemed to us

actual security, and of the intensity of our own love and hope, guarantees for the future.

“Yet,” added he, in a lower and a sadder tone, “I was wrong; but on her account, not mine. For the perils which I exposed her to, I was wrong. I saw it from the outset, or nearly so, though indistinctly. I spoke of it to her; but her own constant habit of undervaluing whatever was personal to herself, led me, after a fashion, to undervalue it also; and when matters grew worse, instead of opening my eyes, I closed them altogether. She loved too well, and I not wisely.’

“Well; I admit your excuse in part at least,” answered Tāntāwee. “But you and she, had you no definite plans for the future? no pre-arranged purpose to obviate the difficulties that she, if not you, must have foreseen?”

“She had hers,” replied Hermann; “plans definite enough, as I learned afterwards, and

perfectly feasible. That they did not finally succeed, the blame was not on her, nor exactly on me either."

"An Arab girl's projects would hardly be other than reasonable," subjoined his friend; "and hers, I make no doubt, were such. But yours? I wonder what yours were, Aḥmed; nothing very practical, I suspect. Something in the romance style, a running away,—a rescue,—eh, Aḥmed? Or was a Jinnee from among the Jann¹ to come in to your aid, as in the stories?"

"Not quite so unreasonable as you choose to suppose," replied the other; "and, had not destiny been against us, they might have readily succeeded. But there is no use in canvassing them now."

"Why so?" asked the Egyptian.

¹ Plural of the former word.

“Because I do not choose,” was Hermann’s answer. “What is the good of discussing the ‘would’ and the ‘might’? Enough; I will tell you what followed.” Then he resumed his tale.

“I rode on, gloomy and purposeless, till the glare of the hot plain below striking up in my face at the last descent, warned me that it was time for me to come to some resolution in view of my own personal safety. So, dismounting, I led my horse a little off the path, tied him to a dwarf oak in a dankish hollow, and sat down close by to eat a piece of bread which I had put into my pocket that morning before leaving ’Omar Agha’s house, and to think collectedly what was next to be done.

“My mind was soon made up. I would go to Mardeen, and there deliver the letter with which I was charged. That was, I imagined, a duty I owed to my master, whom

somehow I could not even yet bring myself to believe a party to the plot laid for my assassination."

"He must have been, though," interposed Tanṭawee.

"Possibly," answered Hermann, "but of that I had not any decisive proof. Besides, I thought that my appearance on Ak-Arslan's business in Mardeen, when it came to be known and commented on afterwards, as it could not fail to be, would act as a sort of screen interposed between myself and my subsequent movements. Yet my stay at Mardeen must not be a long one; the letter I carried might, for aught I knew, contain matter of danger for me; nor were the kinsmen of him whom I had slain that morning likely to be long in tracking and finding me out. So I determined that I would get the letter put into Zenkee Agha's hands by some friend

in the town; secure meanwhile a good feed for myself and my horse, and, if convenient, some provision for the way; and then make off at the shortest possible notice for Ra's-el-'Eyn, the meeting-place appointed by Moħarib. There, I thought, I can best lie concealed till further tidings."

"Not a bad idea," remarked Tantaŵee, "in every point but one,—the same that I mentioned before. You should have gone to Ra's-el-'Eyn straight off at once; your presenting yourself even for an hour at Mardeen was, to say the least of it, superfluous."

"It was so," replied Hermann; "but in the confusion of my ideas it seemed to me a necessity. There was also at the bottom of it a lingering, a most idle, hope of discovering even yet some means for returning to Diar-Bekr; or perhaps it was mere dread that delayed me from taking the plunge into the vague distance."

After a brief pause, he continued.

“Noon,—one of the sultriest noons I ever felt,—was still at its height when I reached Mardeen, and wound my way slowly up the giant hill towards the fortress, within the ruinous circuit of which stood the house of him to whom the letter I bore with me was addressed,—Zenkee Agha. I felt the paper in my breast,—it gave my hand the sensation somehow of a dagger’s point. ‘Another, not I, shall deliver you,’ I said. Then stealthily, guiltily, I slunk into the city, feeling as if everybody’s eyes were upon me, and thought myself fortunate indeed when I arrived, saluted by no one, recognised by no one, claimed by no one,—ah! how unlike the Ahmed Agha of a few days back,—at a friendly door. It was the door of Molla ‘Abd-er-Rahman Effendee, one with whom I had made acquaintance, and who had

treated me kindly when I had formerly come this way.

“The house stood in a bye-street, little frequented at any time: more silent than ever in the dead heat of the hour. But a handsome lad of about twelve years old, and a little girl of six or seven, in a light pink dress,—the molla’s children,—were playing in the shade by the entrance; they recognised me at once; their father, said they, was asleep in the haram. ‘Do us the honour,’ added the boy; I dismounted, and gave him my horse to hold. He passed the rein to his sister, who held it timidly, while her brother ran, and opened for me the door of the guest-room. Wearily I entered it, and sat down on the spotlessly clean divan; the boy left me, and resumed charge of my horse, which he led round to a shed near the gate, and there took care of. The little girl ran

off to the ḥaram, where, I suppose, she gave notice; for a few minutes later the master of the house came in.

“Our greeting was cordial. However, I was obliged to use some reserve in answering his inquiries regarding the errand that had brought me to Mardeen; this done, we remained half-an-hour or so in general conversation. At the end of that time, a young white-turbaned student, pupil of the molla's, and who acted as his servant, on occasions like this, came in, bearing with him on a carefully-burnished copper tray a noon-day meal, prepared in haste; for I had told 'Abd-er-Raḥman that my business was of an urgent nature. Harassed and exhausted as I was, I had really much more need of food than of talk; yet, when the eatables were placed before me, I could ill avail myself of them; excess of fatigue, mental

and bodily, had taken away from me all appetite, and even the power of feigning one. I trifled with some slices of a ready-cut melon, called again and again for water, and drank of it largely.

“The molla, a bright, cheery, neatly-appareled, middle-aged man,—himself a model of quiet and orderly health,—looked anxiously at me. ‘What is the matter with you, Agha?’ said he; ‘are you ill? You were pale and jaded enough when you first came in, but now you seem paler and worse than ever. Eat, in God’s name; it will do you good,—try.’

“‘My worthy friend,’ thought I, ‘had you on your mind the half only of what I have on mine, you would be paler, perhaps, than I.’ Then aloud I said something about the extraordinary heat of the day, the length of the journey that I had come, and so forth. ‘But now,’ I concluded, though without rising

from my place, 'I must go and deliver the letter to Zenkee Agha.'

" 'Let the boy Hamid take it for you,' said my host, making precisely the proposition I trusted he would, 'and do meanwhile lie down here on the divan and take a nap; at sunset you can go to the house yourself, and receive the Agha's answer if he has one to make. Hamid,' continued he, calling his son, and throwing down the sealed paper on the mat before him as the boy entered, 'take that to the house of Zenkee Agha; you know where it is,—up there in the castle, left of the big entrance-gap.' The boy, who, luckily for me, did not in the least know the house, but, from respect for his father, abstained from saying so, picked the letter up, and left the room.

" 'Now do you lie down,' continued the molla, while he arranged the cushions com-

fortably for me on the low divan. I took off my jacket, loosened my girdle, and stretched myself out. My friend next brought a light cotton covering, and threw it over me, saying, 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate; God's blessings on the Prophet; say, "He is one God,"¹ and rest secure; I will come and wake you up before sunset.' He then went out, gently closing the door after him.

"I, for my part, had not the least intention of waiting his return or sunset either; all I meant was to take an hour's repose at the very most, and then to slip away unperceived; by that time my horse would, I calculated, have eaten his barley, and I myself should have regained strength enough for the way.

¹ The first verse of a well-known chapter of the Koran, often recited before going to sleep.

But hardly was I alone than a weight seemed to press on every limb, my ideas became confused, the walls, the windows, the shelves, the objects ranged on them, wavered before me; my eyelids felt as though some one's fingers were closing them, in spite of my efforts to keep them open; a minute more, and I was fast asleep.

“With a violent start I woke,—something had, I thought struck me over the back of the hand. Frightened, I raised my head from the cushion, and looked in that direction; even as I was looking I felt, it seemed, the blow repeated, sharp and hard. I jumped right up; no one was by. The neat little room, with its whitened walls, and clean straw matting, the sentences of the *Kur'an*, and framed specimens of Arab caligraphy hung here and there; the water-jar and glasses on the shelves in the niche; the long pipes and

the shining brass ash-trays, were all there, precisely as I had seen them when I first lay down. Only the sunshine which had then fallen through a little square window bright on the mid-floor, now rested, dull and ruddy, half-way up the wall opposite; the 'Aşr must have passed during my sleep; sunset could not be very far off.

The window looked into the main street on the other side of the house. In that street I now heard steps and voices, as of men going by. Standing up on the divan I peeped through the lattice; and outside I saw,—yes there was no question, I saw,—six villagers, amongst whom I quickly recognised three of my boon-companions of the night before, all armed to the teeth, country-fashion, and with faces and gait that plainly announced evil intentions,—to whom I had no need to ask. They went tramping along up the steep

ascent towards the castle gate; and several townsmen, engaged in animated conversation, were accompanying them thither.

No time was to be lost; the avengers of blood were already within the city-walls; the avengers of family honour and of the sanctity of the haram might not be far off behind. Cursing my own folly for sleeping with my neck in so deadly a noose, indeed for putting it there at all, I waited perforce an instant till the street was still, reclothed myself in haste, and then, opening the door more gently even than the molla had closed it, quitted the apartment. Straight I went to the shed where my horse stood, tied by a halter; his reins hung close by; the saddle had not been removed from his back. Poor beast!—he neighed, much to my annoyance, on seeing me. I stroked and unfastened him, and then, throwing the reins over my arm, led him out

by the halter-rope, as if I was taking him to water. I never saw my friend 'Abd-er-Rahman nor any of his household again.

“My best hope was now to get away unnoticed to the outer town-gate, and then to mount and ride for it; but this was not an easy thing to do, now that the approaching evening had filled the streets with busy or loitering inhabitants. In fact as I turned a corner, with my horse following me, I came right on half-a-dozen of my old Mardeen acquaintances, men of my own condition in life, sitting on wicker stools in front of a large *kaḥwah*, chatting and smoking. When they saw me they hailed me with a simultaneous welcome. To avoid suspicion I acknowledged it, and led my horse near the circle.

“‘Whence come? and whither away?’ was asked by all. My answer was ready: I had brought a letter,—to say thus much truth cannot

hurt, thought I,—from my master, Ak-Arslan Beg, to an Agha in the town; had received,—this was certainly untrue,—the answer; and was now away back for Diar-Bekr. I added that my duty required speed. This very night, I must, so ran my orders, reach the village of Sheykhan, a long twenty miles distant on the return road; hence, I must, for want of time decline the coffee and nargheelah which their friendliness pressed upon me, or I should be too late on the road.

“A few moments of polite expostulation on their part followed my announcement. Seeing that I would not be persuaded, ‘Boy,’ called out one of them to an attendant youngster loitering at the door of the *kaḥwah*, ‘go to such and such a khan, and fetch my horse, along with that of ‘Alee the Seroojee;—or stay,—I will go myself.’ Then, addressing himself to me, ‘Aḥmed Agha, wait here

till I return,' he said; 'I will be back again in an instant; 'Alee and I will mount and accompany you a bit of the way. Never mind about watering your horse here in the town; we shall cross the mill-stream just outside the walls; and the water there is warm and good.'

"Compelled to comply by the dread of seeming unreasonable if I declined the proposal made me, I sat down, the end of my horse's halter in my hand, wishing my courteous friends and the honour of their company at the bottom of the mill-stream, or the Tigris. To augment, if possible, my uneasiness, the conversation now turned on a man, a Koorde they said, found dead that noon, shot through the body, near a village some miles distant. The villagers had just brought the news, and the governor of the town would, no doubt, order search to be

made after the murderer. I am sure that my colour did not change; I was now past that; I even took part in the talk. But I thought that Bedr,—such was the name of my friend who had gone for the horses,—would never have reappeared. My lips spoke, but my mind was absent, and my eyes fixed on the street, watching every passer-by.

“As I sat thus, more uneasy than if the wicker-stool beneath me had been of red-hot iron, a well-dressed negro came hurriedly up; his face was glistening with perspiration, and his half-wild eyes almost starting out of his head. He neared me, and I recognised Aman the Sowahilee¹ an ex-servant, an ex-fellow slave indeed, of mine, once like myself in the service of poor Kara-Mustapha Oghloo, the Pasha of Bagdad. With scarce a word

¹ A generic name for blacks from the Zanzibar coast.

of greeting he leant over my shoulder, whispered hastily into my ear the words, 'For your life, escape;' thrust into my hand something on which he forcibly closed my fingers with his own; and was gone.

"Every one present stared, and asked what this could mean. But before there had been time for answer, and while I could just, only just, restrain myself from rushing away, springing on my horse all unbridled as he was, and galloping wherever he might carry me, Bedr returned with the beasts. I crammed what the negro had given me (a glance had sufficed to show me that it was the letter which I myself had brought for Zenkee Agha, but open, crumpled and torn) into my breast fold, and rose. Within the *kaḥwah* and without, not an eye but was now directed on me, and many were the questions and the conjectures even in that

brief interval; I however, busied with rope and bridle, paid outwardly no attention, and returned no answer. Short, though studiously cheerful and affectionate, were my adieus, as I fastened the last buckle in my horse's head-gear, tightened his girths, and vaulted on his back. Bedr and 'Alee the Seroojee, who were bent on fulfilling the usual duty of old acquaintances by accompanying me for a part of my way, mounted their horses also, though in a more leisurely fashion. They and the rest supposed that I had already taken my leave of Zenkee Agha, for I said that I had done so.

"We rode, the three together, out of the town, and began the long winding descent into the valley, not half so rapidly as I should have liked. Every moment I kept looking around and behind me with a horrible fear; though I knew that I had in al

probability, an hour's grace or more, before there was a serious likelihood of my being pursued or brought back. Indeed, it was far from unlikely, though of that I could not be certain, that the lateness of the hour might prevent anything from being done, or even attempted till the next day. In matters of importance, Eastern deliberation is, you know, generally slow; and the axiom that 'haste is of the devil,'¹ has been the saving of many a guilty, let alone many an innocent, head, from the days of the Prophet,—God's blessing on him and his,—to our own.

"Gradually I quickened my pace; my companions to keep up with me were obliged to do the same. We passed the great fountain at the first bend of the road, traversed

¹ This saying is popularly ascribed to Mahomet himself.

the orchard-lined slope, sun - chequered through the thick leaves on either hand; at its bottom reached the mill-stream. Unwillingly I allowed my thirsty horse a couple of minutes for drinking his fill; Bedr and 'Alee watered theirs also; we then resumed our route.

“ My thoughts had full occupation, now with what I had left behind, now with what lay before me. I had designated the mountain-village of Sheykhan as my goal for the night, simply because it lay far off from Mardeen, on the main road, and entirely out of the direction which I really intended to take. My true object, Ra's-el-'Eyn, was away on our left hand, somewhat to the south. Though indeed, I had never yet been there myself, I had often heard the place mentioned, and had a pretty clear notion of its whereabouts; for the rest, I

might trust that chance inquiry by the way might prevent me from going far wrong.

“But, suppose I got to Ra’s-el-’Eyn, what should I find there? Should I be able to lie quiet and concealed till the storm had blown over? and when would Moḥarib come to find me out? What if he never came? what if the shifting uncertainties of Bedouin life interfered to separate me absolutely from him and from his tribesmen, now my only hope? How then should I regain hold of the lost end of the clue? How even know what had happened or might be happening at Diar-Bekr, till perhaps knowledge itself would be too late for anything but despair? Had I not better at once push on straight for Diar-Bekr at all hazards, and take the chance of one more day, one more meeting? Possibly I might find everything smooth there? No; I put my hand to my breast,

and felt the bulging folds made by the crumpled-up letter that lay concealed there. I remembered Aman's words, his look, as he gave it me; and could not question but that what I now bore about me as a warning to save my life, had been originally intended as a warrant for my death; a warrant written, signed, and sealed at Diar-Bekr itself. It was so indeed; how, and the means by which it had been averted, I will explain to you afterwards.

“But much more than to myself and my own affairs did my thoughts during that strange ride recur, not to Mardeen and Zenkee-Agha, not to Beydar and the revengeful Koordes, nor even to Aḳ-Arslan and his treacherous letter, but to her whom I had left in her father's house at Diar-Bekr, and what might next befall her. She too must have been in some degree, though

how far I could not well guess, suspected, watched, compromised; what might not follow? Yet surely the apprehension of family disgrace, of town-talk and scandal, personal regard, a natural shrinking from being obliged to know too much, the honour of the kindred, above all the near arrival of the Emeer, her cousin, must smother investigation in prudent silence. The Sheykh her father and the others, satisfied that I was gone once for all, would, I trusted, leave her quiet; the whole affair would be one of those forgotten by most, and certainly mentioned by none."

"God is the Veiler," observed Tanṭawee, "and, for me, I like that name as applied to the Deity, better than I should the 'Detective.' It is the worthier one; and its frequent use has had a beneficial effect on us Muslims; it is of a piece with the often-

quoted verse of the Kura'n, 'Much suspicion is a crime.' The Prophet, who wrote it, had a certain magnanimity about him, which often led him into fortunate self-contradictions, broadening where his system would logically, and of itself, have narrowed; and placing human life on a wider basis than a mere strict moralist might have allowed. After all," added he with a slight smile, in which Hermann could not help joining, "the son of 'Abd-Allah, son of 'Abd-el-Muṭṭaleb the Kōreyshee,¹ was half a Bedouin, and his system bears traces of the genuine Bedouin unfixedness of ideas; perhaps also of an underlying scepticism, inherent in our race, and no bad thing either in a lawgiver.

"In fact," continued the Egyptian Beg, as Hermann made no immediate answer, "who

¹ Mahomet.

is it who so exactly knows what is really right, what wrong? or whether indeed there be any such things as absolute right and wrong, more than an absolute east and west? But assuredly if there be, they are not according to the hard traced-out limits of positive laws, ordinances, and definitions, in which legislators and moralists delight. So, my dear boy, while of course, and in agreement with all virtuous and correct people, I think that your conduct and Zahra's too, was very improper, and deserved all kinds of punishment, I must also approve the discreet forbearance of your Diar-Bekr friends, in case they actually exercised it; which I hope, and think most probable, they did."

Hermann resumed his narrative.

"To trust that such would be their conduct was indeed the only soothing balm I could lay to my soul; for the peril which I

had brought on Zahra' was, in my more collected moods, the only point on which I felt, or still feel, abiding self-reproach. But the thought that I had, however unwillingly and unknowingly, requited her love, her absolute, confiding, most unselfish love, with injury, was unendurable to me; and the sole comfort yet left me was to persuade myself that, all things duly weighed, she would remain exempt from blame or harm.

“The scales fell from my eyes. How blind I had been! on what rocks I had run! how near had I thrust myself, day after day, week after week, on all that was most rash, most dangerous, most hopeless, most fatal to us both! It was as though I had been travelling on and on for hours in a thick mist; and then the mist suddenly lifted up, and I saw a wilderness of precipices behind me, on the verge of which I

had been carelessly treading, and another maze of precipices in front, all the worse because clearly defined, and no exit from among them. With this and more in my mind, not as separate and discursive thoughts, but in one single view, and, besides, with the whole anxiety of a refuge-place to be sought out, and an unknown land and future in prospect, you may imagine whether I had much spare attention left me to bestow on the lively conversation of my uninvited and most unwelcome companions who rode along with me, Bedr and 'Alee.

“However, there was no help for it; I must seem to bestow the attention which I could not command. Like one in a dream I heard their voices, as though from a distance, talking of this and that, asking questions, giving news. Like one in a dream, too, I answered the voices; and while I did so my own voice also sounded

to me as like one belonging to some one else, and, with theirs, to come from a distance. Yet I can even at this day remember that my replies were all steadily to the purpose. I had even coolness and reflection enough at the time to wonder at my own self, divided, it seemed, into two distinct persons; one of whom was talking with and listening to my fellow-riders, the other, lost in thoughts of anxiety and pain, far away. I might have added to these a third person, namely my own conscious and individual self, commenting on the other two, and interested in, I had almost said amused by, their performance.

“By field and stone, over brook and causeway, we rode on. The sun, already far declined in the sky when we started from Mardeen, and latterly hidden behind the dingy cloud-piles of a gathering heat-storm, now broke suddenly out through a cleft of molten

gold not far above the horizon, flooding rock and tree, hill and dale, with yellow dazzling light. It shone full in our eyes; we could scarcely see twenty yards before or around us.

“Well for me that it was so. For, exactly at that moment of sun-burst, a party of seven horsemen, armed some with guns, others with spears, came towards us at scarcely bowshot distance along another path, parallel with ours, and which for a short space opened out by a cross gully on the valley in which we were. Their faces were set for Mardeen.

’Alee and Bedr, busied just then in shading their eyes with their hands from the level and blinding splendour, did not notice the passers by. But I, whose senses were now wrought up to an almost preternatural quickness of vigilance, saw them only too clearly; and, in spite of the intervening light-curtain, recognised among them three of Ak-Arslan Beg’s men.

Nor less did I, by their long quivering spears and fluttering head-dresses, recognise the four others for Bedouins of the South; these, I could not doubt, were no others than the Emeer Daghfel's clansmen. Whom they sought and what they purposed needed no telling, at least to me.

“ Here then, was the fullest confirmation of my very worst fears; the game was up in every sense and in every quarter. Not yet half escaped from the vengeance of blood, I had run into the jaws of that far deadlier thing, the vengeance of family dishonour. For a few seconds my breath was absolutely taken away. I stiffened in my saddle where I sat. Look, I dared not, lest I should by doing so draw the attention of my companions to the objects of my terror; lest they themselves should, with instinctive perception equal to my own, recognise me in their turn. Yet how not look, when they

might be even now preparing to rush upon our path? In that case, I knew beforehand what would be my fate: a shout, a spear-thrust, a death-struggle in the dust, a knife across my throat, and all would be over.

“ But in that deluge of unearthly glitter then streaming down the valley, my death-hunters had, it seemed, distinguished nothing; intent only on what they deemed before, and which was in reality already behind them, they moved rapidly onwards, and in a minute more a winding of the road had hid them from our sight, and us from theirs, behind the screen of an intervening rock. I drew breath again. However the apparition just beheld, had effaced every idea, near or far, from my mind, except one; namely, the necessity of putting, and that instantly, such a distance between Mardeen and myself, as might baffle the double chase which, I now anticipated would,

before the evening light had faded from the sky, be hot on my track. But how? Bedr and 'Alee were yet with me.

“Almost immediately afterwards the sun had again immersed himself in the dense cloud-bed; and we found ourselves in front of a hill, wooded from bottom to top; the road for Diar-Bekr led up between the trees.

“Here was an opportunity for me to get loose, and I availed myself of it to the utmost; using every phrase of polite expostulation to persuade my over-friendly associates to return home; they would else be belated, the sun was near setting, I must put my horse to better speed, and so on. But they, desirous not to be outdone in courtesy, and meaning the very best, insisted on accompanying me to the top of the hill. I had by this time lost all tongue for conversing and all power of attention for listening; and most glad was

I that the narrowness of the track as it clomb and wound among the rocks and trees of the ascent, obliged us henceforth to ride not abreast, but one by one, and thus gave me fair pretext for keeping silence. Moreover, I hoped that my taciturnity might be taken by them as a hint, and so contribute to cool their persistent ardour for my company.

“Ten minutes more, and we had reached the summit of the hill. Here was a small, dry, open patch of ground, where the road separated into three paths; the principal one led in the direction of Sheykhān; two others branched off to the left. The sun had set; and the dark clouds, out of which a low growl of thunder issued from time to time, threatened to make a short twilight.

“’Alee turned towards me. ‘Do you see that dark mountain?’ said he. ‘Well; it is a good two hours’ distance from hence; and

the village of Sheykhan lies rather farther off on the other side of it. You can never get there in anything like reasonable time this evening; and you know the proverb, 'Late guest, no supper.' It is sheer nonsense your trying to get there to-night. Give up the idea, brother Agha, and let us all ride on together only as far as Chark,'—a hamlet not half-an-hour distant from where we were, somewhat off the main road among the hills. 'I know the mukhtar of the place, and will bring you to his house. There we shall find a good supper and a comfortable bed, besides barley in plenty for our horses, and we will make a merry night of it. You, if you choose, can set out again by break of day, and be at Sheykhan long before noon; whilst Bedr Agha and I will return home at leisure. Better do so than kill your horse and yourself by travelling on a night like this. Listen to

the thunder there,—the rain will soon come down heavy,—the road is a very bad one, rocks and ravines; and God knows what might happen to you in the dark.’

“I had all the difficulty in the world to escape from his well-meant proposal; which would, indeed, have been the only sensible plan for me to follow had I really meant to travel whither I said. But as that was precisely what I did not mean, to accept was out of the question.

“So I exhausted the whole vocabulary of thanks for their obligingness; expressed my regret at I know not what hindrances, conjured up on the spur of the moment; and did my best to make the leave-taking as short as might be, while they on the contrary seemed determined to prolong it to the utmost. Could any one have looked into our three minds, and seen the total discrepancy between what

I thought and what the two Aghas thought as we stayed our horses, a pretty little group on the open ground atop of the wooded hill in the pale evening light, with dark rock and ravine below, it would have been a curious spectacle.

“At last they took the leave I was so impatient to give, and turned to retrace their Mardeen-wards way. While they were actually quitting me, I had my horse’s head in the direction of Sheykhan, for appearance’ sake; but having done so I held him in, and remained where I was, waiting; till, on looking back, I was certain that the last glimpse of my friends and their beasts had disappeared among the trees and windings of the desert. Then, leaving the road for which I had professed myself so eager on the right, I turned sharp left, and made off, as quickly as the fast-gathering gloom allowed me, first along the crest of

the high ground, and then down into the valley beneath, keeping my course between west and south, in what I conjectured to be the direction of Meska, the nearest village, I had understood, and on my way to Ra's-el'Eyn.

“It was pitch dark before I had gone far, and the rain came down in torrents; the track, or rather no-track, was thwarted by trees, and strewn with the tumbled blocks of stone; occasionally also it led across swampy miry patches of deep mud, not easy to traverse even by daylight; often I lost it, such as it was, altogether. But I had no leisure now for picking my way; so rode on at a venture. I was in fact entangled in one of the worst parts of the Karajah mountains, and nothing remained for it but to push through at my best; further on, I knew, was plain. The thunder rolled almost unceasingly; the rain poured; unfortunately for me the lightning came faint

and seldom; I should have welcomed the guidance of its gleam.

“What a constant strain it was on my eyes to try to discern the indications of a path! What a strain on nerve and hand to keep my beast from stumbling and starting amid the ever-recurring obstacles of the way! What a strain of mind not to lose the supposed direction of Ra's-el-'Eyn in the unknown labyrinth of mountain, valley, wood, and night! What momentary apprehension of rolling suddenly over, horse and man, into some torrent-bed or rocky chasm! Yet happen what might, I was very glad to be thus far advanced anyhow; and urged rapidly on with feverish haste to put the Karajah between myself and Mardeen; they must be keen pursuers who would reach me then. In fine, what between wet, darkness, fatigue, hunger, wayside danger, and the uncertainty where I could find deliverance from

all five, or from some of them at least, my thoughts were not unreasonably taken up, and I was for the moment spared many disagreeable reflections on my own conduct and on the past. Alas! they were only put off; they have had ample leisure to torment me since.

“Midnight had long passed, and the night must have almost waned, though not a glimpse of dawn yet broke the clouded sky, when I reached the village of Meska. I could just make out before me certain black things and patches that were, I knew, houses and enclosure-walls; but there was no light or sign of life and waking among the inhabitants; every door was closed, every window dark. The rain, which had ceased for awhile, began again heavily, the wind rose; and I was well pleased to discover, after much prowling about, an empty shed, in which my horse and I could

take shelter from the weather, and await the morning.

“Sullenly it came, chill and showery. I was not sorry, because it kept almost every one within doors ; so that I hardly met a single individual on the move while I hunted out a vendor or donor of bread and cheese,—very bad cheese too ; I remember its taste,—part of which I ate on the spot, and part thrust into my saddle-bags for the day’s provision. I procured also some indifferent gritty barley for my horse ; and then, by means of a few cautious inquiries, found out on which side of me lay the road to Ra’s-el-’Eyn. Towards it I now set forth, wet and weary to the last degree ; however, Karajah Dagh was behind me for good, and the plain before.

“All that day, and all the night that followed, I rode on, with hardly a pause. How many black mud cottages and stubble fields,

how many streams and swamps, resoaked by the recent storm, how many monotonous undulations of ground and stone-strewn levels, each like the other in ugliness, I traversed, I do not know. Indeed, I barely noticed them; my hands were burning hot, my mouth dry, my head throbbed, my sight was confused and hazy, my thoughts refused to frame themselves into any distinctness. The present, with its dreary surroundings, was a mere blank; images of the past alone kept reproducing themselves, and the more I drove them away, the thicker they crowded on me. Home faces, home scenes, sights and sounds of childhood, my father, my sisters, my mother, my village play-fellows, figures absent for months, almost for years, from my mind, now passed and repassed, blended and thronged before me; mixed up with Begs, Pashas, Aghas, Koordes, Bedouins, negroes; one face, too, not of my

old home, yet itself my true home, was unceasingly there among and through the other phantoms, like the moon amid a mottled drift of clouds.

“I remember besides, that the day-sun was watery and hot, the evening clear and fresh, the night calm and starry. I remember that my horse,—poor over-tasked slave,—twice stumbled and fell with me in the dark; though how he rose and how I remounted him I do not remember. I remember the whitey-grey look of the low cottage walls of Ra's-el-'Eyn as I drew near it, its dogs and its refuse-heaps in the silvery morning. I remember myself, on foot somehow, being led or supported by some one through what seemed to me a kind of vault or passage; and then, for what was an interval of five or six days, I remember no more.

PART III.

The blank horizon mocks my eye
That seeks it round for thee ;
There is no message from the sky,
Nor answer from the sea.

And thronging reasons urge, each one
Enough for love's despair ;
Yet still I hope, though reason none
For hope but hope be there.

“BUT I must hasten with my tale,” continued Hermann, looking up as he spoke at the moon, which now rose high and bright above the mast-head, announcing that midnight had passed, while the breeze freshened, and the ship, slightly plunging, drove on ; “there is not much more to tell.

“When, after several days of total unconsciousness, I came to myself, I was in a small low room, or rather house, for the flat earth-roof above it covered only one apart-

ment. The floor was earth also, and a narrow mattress stretched on it formed my bed ; the walls were quite bare ; an open, but now unkindled fireplace occupied one end of the oblong space ; over my head were the naked rafters, blackened with the smoke of winter-time. By my side, watching me as carefully as though I had been a sick child or brother of his, sat Aman, the negro who had rendered me such useful service at Mardeen. An old woman, bent and grey, in very dirty and tattered clothes, and generally with a house-broom, a pitcher, a copper-tray, or some such-like article of domestic usage in her hand, kept coming in and going out every half-hour : she was the mistress of the cottage, and, her guests excepted, its sole occupant. Such, on my first waking, were the objects around me.

“ It was some time before I understood, or

even cared to understand, where I was, or how. Excessive weakness had deprived me not only of the power to ask many questions, but even of the wish to ask them. The very name of Ras'-el-'Eyn surprised me at first; I recollected no reason for my being there. But the fever had left me; hour by hour mind and body regained strength, and Aman, who had no notion that silence could be conducive to convalescence, was always ready enough to talk.

“Medicine of course there was and had been none; a village ḥakeem¹ who occasionally officiated in the smearing of pitch or yellow-arsenic on mangy camels, shaved heads, and besides a much-worn razor of excessive sharpness, had about him a small pointed clasp-knife for surgical uses, had twice bled me copiously

¹ Barber-surgeon.

the very day of my arrival; but, fortunately for me, had not come near me since: the blackness of the blood having convinced him that even his skill could not avail. So Aman had summoned a poor, lean, old sheykh, the Imam,¹ of the hamlet, who from time to time came and read, with many errors of grammar and some of pronunciation, the Kura'n over me. The old man continued his visits after I had entered on the recovery of which he gave the main credit, next after God, to the efficacy of his readings; and I found him simple-hearted, conversable, and kind.

“More beneficial however than any directly curative measures of ḥakeem or Kāree,’² had been the nursing given me by Aman, who, like most of his complexion, was a first-

¹ Prayer-reader or precentor; sometimes very erroneously rendered “priest.”

² Koran-reader.

rate hand in that respect. Nothing had been left undone; indeed what fault there might be, had been more in excess than defect: as, for instance, his reiterated invitations to me to eat, on the very first symptom of my being able to do so. And if my diet (mostly barghol,¹ and butter, for milk was strictly forbidden) had not been very choice, the absence of all appetite, and consequently of feeding, during the height of the fever, and its redoubled vigour and keenness when it at last returned, rendered it at the one period harmless, and at the other healthful.

“ But the best remedy of all was the life-giving briskness of the air, the air of the desert-border, scarcely inferior in purity to that of the desert itself. Uncontaminated even by the dirt of the village, it penetrated,

¹ Half-roasted corn, coarsely ground, and boiled with grease, a favourite peasant dish in these parts.

a breath of healing, within the four walls of my narrow den ; and before many days were over revived in me strength and interest enough to inquire and to hear what I in part guessed of myself, even before it was told me.

“The story was a very simple one. Fatigue, exposure, hunger, wet, fear, distress, remorse, had all been at work on me during the three days and nights that had elapsed from my last parting with Moharib at the north gate of Diar-Bekr up to my arrival at Ra's-el-'Eyn ; and for several hours before reaching it I must have been in the half-delirium preceding a violent attack of fever. The desire to reach my hoped-for asylum, the village, had doubtless, though unknown to myself, kept me up till the moment of entering it ; that done, I had dropped senseless from my horse.

“ The inhabitants of Ra's-el-'Eyn are Arabs, and claim descent from the ancient tribe of ẖey'. From time immemorial they have, as you perhaps know—”

“ No, I did not,” observed ẖanṭawee, “ but I can well believe it.”—

“ Maintained themselves independent of all surrounding governments ; and have made of their territory a sort of refuge-place for rebels, criminals, and runaways of every description from the neighbouring districts ; a conduct securing them the alliance of many more useful at a pinch than the government itself. Seeing me, they naturally supposed me, and were not far wrong in doing so, to be one of their customary guests, in need of shelter ; and at once received me to the hospitality, such as it was, and protection which they never refused when so sought. My dress and appearance too announced me

for a person of some consideration ; and my youth not improbably enlisted their sympathies in my behalf. So they lifted me up ; and carried me into the almost empty cottage of an old woman, whose two grown-up sons were absent on a raid far west, commending me to her care. They next brought their ḥakeem, or muzeyyin¹ rather, to visit me ; and his energetic proceedings had nearly spared them all future trouble, except that of grave-digging, on my account.

“ However, God willed it otherwise ; and on the evening of that same day, Aman the Sowahilee (who, dreading with good cause the consequences of his own boldness in saving me, had a few hours later, fled from Mardeen) arrived, but on foot, at the Arab stronghold, a refugee like myself. There he quickly learnt

¹ Barber.

from the peasants that a horseman, whose appearance and horse they described, had come soon after sunrise, in pitiable plight ; and that he was now lying, speechless and almost dead, in one of their huts. The negro guessed who it might be, and without delay went to the place where I was. There he took up his own quarters, nor had ever quitted me ; and to his unremitting and affectionate though untutored care, I owe that I am not now, instead of being here with you on my way to 'Akka, quietly lodged among the little mounds, marked by rough stones and overgrown with wild narcissus, close outside the village of Ra's-el-'Eyn."

"Is that the same Aman whom I have often seen attending you," inquired Tāntawee ; "a big, raw-boned, pitch-black, ugly fellow, six feet high ? He must have been an odd sort of nurse for one like yourself."

“The same; and may it never be my luck to be worse tended,” answered Hermann, clapping his hands, and calling out “Aman” two or three times. At the call a bundled-up blanket on the deck near the foremast opened out; and a huge negro, in a not very clean suit of underclothes, issued from it, and approaching, stood sleepy and bare-foot before the two talkers, rubbing his eyes.

“Aman,” repeated Hermann.

“My master,” answered the black.

“Take this and fill it for me,” said Hermann, tossing him the almost empty tobacco-pouch. Aman picked it up, retired with it to another part of the ship where the requisite article was kept, replenished the small cloth bag, and returned with it; then, at a look, he filled, lighted, and presented his master’s pipe, doing afterwards the like service for Tanṭawee Beg.

“Bring us now some fresh water,” added Hermann; the negro obeyed. As he came up a second time, jug in hand, “Show us your side, lad,” said his master.

The black unbuttoned and hitched up his cotton jacket, disclosing in the skin underneath it a ragged, unsightly seam, several inches long, the mark where a frightful gash had been made in the flesh, immediately below the left ribs.

Taṇṭawee looked at it with the air of one to whom such things were by no means new, and asked, “How was that got?”

Aman made no answer; but Hermann said, “You shall hear, Beg, before my story is finished; the wound you see there was meant to have been in my side, only somewhat deeper.” Then, addressing Aman, “Put the jug down here, and go to sleep again.”

The negro made his obeisance, and returning to his blanket, rolled himself comfortably up for a second nap.

“That Sowahilee has twice saved my life at the risk of his own,” remarked Hermann; “once at Mardeen, and once,—how I will soon tell you,—in the desert; besides a third time, less dangerous to himself, but not for that less necessary to me, when he nursed me at Ra’s-el-’Eyn.”

“He seems a fine sturdy fellow,” answered Tāntawee, looking towards the reclining figure, or rather the blanket which represented it; “and I do not wonder at your valuing him highly. He deserves it. When a negro is faithful he is so altogether; and, if kindly and discreetly treated, they are seldom otherwise.

“You, however,” continued the Beg to Hermann, “have forgotten to explain to me

what this Aman of yours did for you at Mardeen. He brought you back the letter I remember, but how did he get hold of it himself? And how came he to be so well acquainted with its contents? I should hardly think that he was scholar enough to have read it, judging by his looks."

"It was only during my own convalescence at Ra's-el-'Eyn that I myself became acquainted with the circumstances of that affair," replied his friend, resuming the interrupted narrative.

"While I was asleep in the guest-room of my Mardeen host, the Molla 'Abd-er-Rahman, his son, young Hamed, who had taken Ak-Arslan's letter in charge, went roving about with it in search for Zenkee Agha's domicile, of which and its whereabouts he had the vaguest possible notion. In the street he fell in with a servant of Zenkee Agha's, a

native of Mardeen, and to him in turn he confided the letter. The servant promised to return home and deliver it to his master at once; but, instead of doing so, he went first to lounge and gossip in a neighbouring *kaḥwah*, where he idled the time away; and at last, whether overcome by the oppressive heat of that sultry afternoon, or, more probably, by the effects of an extra glass of *raḳee*, stretched himself at full length on a bench, and there fell sound asleep, with the letter sticking half-way out of the pocket of his jacket.

“Meantime the negro Aman, the Sowaḥilee, who was also now in Zenkee Agha’s service, and had been so for some months, happened to enter the *kaḥwah*, where he found his white comrade snoring at his ease. Aman sat down, and entered into conversation with the other idlers there; from

whom he learnt that the document thus carelessly exposed to view was a letter from Ak-Arslan Beg to his master. He made some inquiries as to who had brought it from Diar-Bekr; and the answers and description given led him to conjecture that the original bearer could have been no other than myself, his old comrade, the white Agha, Ahmed.

“Suspecting some mischief at work, Aman approached the sleeper, gently drew away the document, and, saying to the lookers on, that he was going straight to the Castle, and would himself present the letter to its destination, left the *kaḥwah* with it. From thence he took his way to the lower quarter of the town, where lived an old Sheykh, a friend of his, and famous for the writing out of charms and amulets for negro use; him he begged to read him the letter, a feat

much beyond Aman's own powers. The Sheykh, after some hesitation, yielded to the persuasive eloquence of a beshlik,¹ and complied. But both reader and hearer looked aghast when they found that the document was nothing else than a concise request, expressed in excellent Turkish, to send the bearer Aḥmed Agha the Bagdadee,—for by that surname I was then commonly distinguished,—with all convenient speed and despatch to a region considerably beyond Mardeen or any other town in the land of the living. Enjoining absolute silence on the old man, the negro snatched up the letter; what he did with it I have already told you.

“From Aman, too, I now heard further

¹ A silver coin, equivalent to five piastres sterling; then worth about seven shillings English, now barely tenpence.

particulars regarding the search that had been made after me in every direction, north, south, east, and west; except of course at Ra's-el-'Eyn, whither no Koorde or Turk would much care to venture on such an errand. From Beydar, from Diar-Bekr, and from Mardeen, the cry for my blood had gone forth simultaneously; and the armed peasants whom I had seen in the street, the banded horsemen whom I had so nearly met in the valley, were only a few of the many who, although from different motives, had resolved on taking my life. To the premature haste of the assassins at the entrance of the pass, and to my own sudden flight, covered by storm and darkness, I had owed my preservation; half a day later, and nothing could have saved me.

“One circumstance, however, which Aman did not nor could know, I learnt somewhat afterwards. The spear-bearing riders, whom

I had seen on the evening of my flight in company with Ak-Arslan's men, were indeed Bedouins of the South, but they were not Sheybanees, nor did they belong to the Emeer Daghfel's clan. They were on the contrary Benoo-Riaḥ, tribesmen of my ever-true Moḥarib; and it was at his instigation that they had joined themselves to the Koordish horsemen, in appearance to aid, really to baffle the chase. Two of them, keener-sighted than the Koordes, had in fact recognised me then and there on the road, but kept their counsel and said nothing of it, only urging the others to make more haste, and anticipate my escape from Mardeen; thus leading the pursuers away from the prey that they sought.

"All this came to light through one of the Benoo-Riaḥ themselves, who, ten days after the event, appeared under some ordinary pretext at Ra's-el-'Eyn. There he spoke

with Aman ; but would not visit the cottage where I still lay, nor say the entire truth, even to the negro ; such straightforward proceedings not suiting the distrustfulness of his kind. However, to Aman he gave intelligence that Akhoo-Leyla,¹ so he styled Moḥarib, was yet in the neighbourhood of Diar-Bekr ; there waiting, said he with all the cool off-handedness of a Bedouin telling what he knows to be an utter lie, and in no way disconcerted if the hearer discovers it to be such, the celebration of the nuptials between the Emeer Daghfel, the Sheybanee, and the daughter of Sheykh Asa'ad. The wedding would be a very ceremonious one, he said, and was to take place after a few days. Of all which, when related to me, I believed or disbelieved as much as I chose, but said nothing.

¹ " Brother of Leyla." A Bedouin, especially if unmarried, often derives his surname from his sister.

“ For a change had come over me ; I hardly recognised myself. The fever on quitting me had taken away along with it every trace of the excessive agitation and anxiety under which I had been labouring before, and had left me singularly calm ; hopeful indeed and desirous at heart, but in the main disposed for the present to float with the stream and trust to events.

“ In this calm of mind it seemed to me that every person and everything without must be calm also. Hours long I lay, without movement or desire to move, watching now the lights and shadows that played on the wall, now the comings and goings of my age-bent hostess on her house-keeping cares ; or listening to the half-childish talk of the old Kura'n-reading Sheykh and Aman at my bedside. No reflection of the past troubled me, no forecasting of the future, no wish

even to be otherwise or elsewhere than I was, disturbed my quiet. The thought of Zahra' herself aroused no vehement emotion; the mention of her Bedouin cousin and suitor's name no apprehension. It was well with her; it was well with me; it was well with all; and would be well. Fear had left me; the passionate, unsatisfied longings of my heart had left me too. I was in truth unwittingly experiencing in myself, what I have since observed in others, that prolonged delirium causes a breach in the continuity of life which may be, in unimpaired frames at least, ultimately quite bridged over, but not at once. Or, if you will, I remained these days, though awake, in a kind of half slumber, a pleasing trance, from which the rousing, though deferred, must come at last. It came only too soon.

“Meanwhile a fortnight passed thus; every

hour brought me a sure, though gradual, increase of strength. Before long I could not merely sit up, but even, aided by Aman, quit the room and get out of doors a little space, there to enjoy the pure free air of the open plain, and the boundless prospect of its level, west and south. Eastward the blue wavy line of Sinjar¹ fringed the horizon; to the north the dark mass of K̄arajah-Dagh closed in the view more nearly. How often did I gaze on its wooded screen, and languidly wonder what was going on behind it, what might next issue forth from it; though while gazing I felt little impatience, contented in a manner to be just then an unoccupied convalescent, and no more. But when, the fortnight ended, I tried my foot in the stirrup, and found that I could, with some help to be sure, get on

¹ A low mountain-chain of Mesopotamia, the stronghold of the Yezedes, described by Layard.

my horse's back again, something of the old feeling came over me ; and I began to look at the distance with other eyes. However, the caution of the inhabitants would not have allowed me, even had I been then able, to venture far without the bounds of the village.

“ A fortnight, three weeks, a fourth had begun. Restlessness was fast growing on me ; and on the first afternoon of that fourth week I was sitting on a small green hillock without the hamlet, gazing anxiously northward, when a cloud of dust arising from the plain announced a troop of horsemen. They approached ; their lances, their manner of riding, their accoutrements proclaimed them Benoo-Riaḥ. It was Moḥarib, and with him half a dozen of his clan. Alighting at some distance from the village, they held a brief parley with the inhabitants, several of whom had gone out to meet them, and welcome

them, for they were well-known guests of old, to the hospitality of the place.

“ While the first salutations were yet being exchanged, Moḥarib left the rest, and came where I was. We embraced like brothers who had been parted not for days but years ; and, for the very abundance of what we had to say the one to the other, said little then beyond inquiries after health and expressions of pleasure. A sheep was killed and cooked, plenty of barghol¹ and rakeek² prepared, and the new arrivals sat down to an abundant supper, to which their appetites did full justice ; the very dogs without the circle found indifferent pickings on the well-gnawed bones that were thrown to them that evening.

¹ See page 126, *note*.

² The thin, wafer-like, unleavened bread, ordinary in the East.

“The conversation between the Bedouins and their half-Bedouin hosts seemed to me, in my limited acquaintance with the dialect and the idioms employed, little better than an enigma which excited without satisfying my curiosity. But supper over, Moḥarib and I went apart into the cottage; and there, seated together on the couch which had long served me for a sick bed, but was now modified into a divan, the only one that the poverty of Ra's-el-'Eyn could afford, passed well nigh the night through in talk that left no inclination for early sleep.

“His story, given in consecutive form, ran thus. Every one at Diar-Bekr supposed me dead; a distorted version of my adventure on the morning that I quitted Beydar had given rise to this belief, which had subsequently been studiously fostered, in my interest, by those who knew or guessed

my real whereabouts. Five days after my disappearance the long-expected Emeer of Benoo-Sheyban had arrived at Diar-Bekr, and remained there a fortnight. Great had been the display of hospitality on the occasion, and countless were the sheep slaughtered (Moħarib dwelt on the fact with undisguised Bedouin relish), with festivities of every description to match. But no wedding had taken place, much to the surprise of all, said Moħarib with a covert smile about his mouth; that was, report affirmed, to be celebrated on their arrival at Zulfeh in Nejd, on the frontiers of Sedeyr, within the Emeer's own territory. Thither they would journey by the easiest and most frequented route, that which leads from Diar-Bekr by Harran¹ to Rakka, on

¹ The Haran of the biblical Abraham.

the Euphrates; and thence, following the westerly bank of the river, down to the desert. The caravan had already set out, but would probably be some three months on its way before reaching Zulfeh, as it was sure to travel slowly and to halt often.

“I inquired about my former master, Aḳ-Arslan, and his doings. Old Afsheen Beg’s marriage, and the feastings and amusements attending it, in some of which Moḥarib had managed to take part, had been held at the time appointed. Aḳ-Arslan remained but a short time more in the town, and then took leave, and returned with his Koordish retinue, my ex-comrades, to Jezeerah. ‘The Beg,’ added Moḥarib, ‘was in very bad humour. His men too were discontented; some of them, one Maḳan Agha in particular, a very popular fellow among them, attributed your disappearance and supposed

death to their master's machinations, and plotted revenge. But what came of it, or whether anything was likely to come of it, I do not know.'

" 'Never fear,' I answered, laughing, 'Ak-Arslan Beg can take good care of himself; he knows his men better than they think for. But what said the Emeer Daghfel? was he aware of anything?'

" 'Nothing,' replied Moḥarib; 'Sheykh Asa'ad very wisely kept all quiet, for fear of scandal; and neither the Emeer nor his men so much as guessed the truth. Besides the Sheybanees camped outside the walls, some way off in the gardens, and had little communication with the townsfolk. As to the Emeer, he lodged with his intended father-in-law, and there heard only what they chose to tell him. There was indeed some talk about the Jinnee: it served to put off the wedding.'

“‘God preserve her!’ said I; ‘she is as clever as she is brave, and as brave as she is beautiful. There is none like her on earth!’

“‘The wiles of women are indeed wonderful,’ answered the Bedouin; ‘she is the miracle of her age. God keep her, and grant her desire, and yours, my brother. Who perseveres attains.’

“I next asked from what quarter suspicion had first arisen regarding us—who was its author.

“‘Some one of Rustoom Beg’s household,’ he answered, ‘gave the alarm, the very day you arrived at Diar-Bekr. You had been watched the year before, Agha, though you were not aware of it. The Beg took up the matter, went to the kiosk; and,—you know the rest. Ak-Arslan was soon informed, and the Sheykh Asa’ad was taken

into counsel. He refused to stir in the affair, but did not oppose. By the others your death was resolved on. May my father and mother be your ransom,' he added; 'God frustrated their designs.'

"And now brother,' said I, when he had finished, 'what is to be done next? Where are we to go? when shall I meet her again?'

"His reply unveiled to me the plan, formed originally at Diar-Bekr, and now to be executed in earnest. It was thus:—

"Moḥarib's clansmen, the Benoo-Riaḥ, were now the most part, with their aged chief, Aboo-Zeyd, the Emeer Faris, encamped near Tell-'Afr,¹ westward of Moṣool. Thither we were next to go; and when we arrived, Moḥarib was to present me to the Emeer as an adopted brother, and one seeking protection

¹ A rising pasture-ground.

and assistance from the tribe. I should, he said, be without doubt well received, and asked to explain the object I had in view. 'This,' continued Moḥarib, 'you must at once do, briefly and plainly, to the Emeer himself, during your very first meeting, while you are yet under the shadow of his tent, and your hand on the tent-pole. There would be no use your attempting to conceal anything from Aboo-Zeyd: he is shrewd and far-sighted, and nothing escapes him; but he is generous, and never refuses a suppliant. Besides, he will be the readier in this matter on account of an old grudge existing between us and Benoo-Sheyban, whom he will be glad to have an occasion of annoying.'

"We might have, he continued, to wait for some days at Tell-'Afr; after which, when all was ready, he and I, accompanied by a dozen or so of the more daring among the

clan, would set out southwards by the shortest track, till we fell in with the Emeer Daghfel and his caravan, probably in the neighbourhood of Zobeyr, west of Başrah. Once met, we would, by force, stratagem, or both, find means to enter the caravan, and carry off with us the 'sought for'—Moḥarib never designated Zahra' in my presence by her own name,—away to some secure region, beyond danger of pursuit.

“Of this scheme Zahra' had herself, as I now learnt, been fully informed, and had consented to it; only the precise time and place of its fulfilment could not be fixed beforehand, amid the uncertainties both of their movements, and of our own. Thus far alone was certain, that the attempt must be made somewhere on the line of route between Rakka and the boundaries of Nejd; if once the latter were past, nothing could be done.”

“And when you had compassed your wish, whither did you intend betaking yourself, Ahmed?” asked Tanṭawee.

“I did not very well know myself,” replied his friend. “Sometimes I thought of Damascus, and of a life there in trade or business of whatever sort; at other times I designed settling in the Hejaz or Yemen; or I might seek my fortunes in Egypt; and this last, you see, I have in fact done, though not with the object or under the circumstances that were then in my mind. But, if you will have the truth, my projects went in their definite shape hardly, or not at all, further than Zahra’; with her they began, with her they ended; from her to her was the measure of my thought.”

“It would never have answered;” remarked Tanṭawee, musingly. “Well for her as for you,—your fate, wiser than yourself, interfered.”

Of this comment Hermann took no notice ; but continued—

“ Three days Moḥarib and his men remained at Ra’s-el-Eyn ; their departure and mine was fixed for the fourth. Every trace of the feebleness left on me by my late illness was rapidly disappearing, and with the weakness of body, that of mind and will was fast leaving me also. But the calm, the contented rest of soul that I had, as for a short breathing-space enjoyed, vanished too ; and in its stead my old restless, impetuous, longing self returned. Not at once, eager as I was to mount and follow on the track of her who was then, as ever, all to me ; yet the first day’s sun set on my renewed converse with the brother of my love, and I had no feelings but of joy, almost of satisfaction.

“ It could not last. The sight of a face so intimately inwoven in my mind with the me-

mory of hers ; the sound of a voice that had blended with hers that night of meeting ; the frequent mention ; the nearer hope,—all worked secretly, and prepared the inward stab of my peace that bleeds even now, and will bleed till death. It was given suddenly, in sleep.

“ That evening, Moḥarib and I had sat up till late in the open air, between the tents and the village, both of them whitened by the intense moonlight of the plain. After much talk, chiefly of her, we separated ; and I returned, more serious than before, but still cheerful, to my accustomed lodging-place, and lay down for rest.

“ Sleep soon came, but unquiet, and full of dreams. It seemed to me that I was embarked on a ship, sailing over a distant and stormy sea ; Zahra’ was in a boat close by ; I strove to come to her, and she to me ; in vain ; the waves drove us apart. Then I was at

Rosenau, my birthplace; Zahra' sat by me in my father's house, but all around the table were the faces of corpses; her face too was fixed and deadly pale. Then I was at Bagdad, in the sleeping-room; my old master was speaking to me about Zahra'; blood ran down his dress. Sa'eed lay near dead; I felt, but could not see, his fingers cold in my hand. At last these too disappeared, and gave place to a dream so vivid, so painfully real, that no waking pang could have exceeded its anguish: I have never since ceased to feel it."

"What was the dream?" asked Ṭanṭawee, as Hermann paused an instant. "Can you repeat it?"

"I could, even now," replied Hermann; "point by point, just as it came before me; the miserable vividness of its representation has not been softened by lapse of time, nor can be. But tell it so I cannot, nor will. Hear it,

however, as I put it into verse five months later, while sailing, drear and lonely, along the Bahreyn coast.¹

“Oh why is memory in the brain?
Or why the hated dreams of sleep?
To weave the real with imaged pain,
And weep-out tears again to weep.
Last night, within the garden-bower
We sat together, side by side ;
The lover of an ill-starred hour,
And she that should have been my bride.

“I spoke, she answered, words of love ;
I sought her drooping hand to clasp.
She looked around, beneath, above,
And trembled to return the grasp.
I asked a kiss ; her lips she gave,
A hasty gift, as snatched from fear :
So hastes the oft-detected slave
Who knows his master’s footsteps near.

“Then round my neck her arms she cast,
And on my breast her head she laid,
And present woe and anguish past
In one brief moment overpaid.
‘Yet, dearest, why this silence long
To many a message, many a line?
What cold mistrust, what trait’rous wrong
To fraud me of thy answering sign?

¹ In the Persian Gulf.

“ ‘Oh, words of scorn and words of shame
Are all for months these ears have heard ;
From thee nor line nor message came,
But aching heart and hope deferred.
I knew thou wouldst not leave me so ;
Not thine the heart to change or pall ;
Thou couldst not thus her love forego
Who gave thee much—who gave thee all.’

“ Her tears were trickling on my cheek,
Her scattered locks my arm o’erspread,
And the wild kiss that fain would seek
To drain life’s proper fountain-head.
I clasped her round, I bade her rise,
I bade her fly nor tarry more ;—
‘New love, new hope before us lies,
And open stands the prison door.’

“ ‘Oh, how to rise, or how to fly ?
The toils of fate are round me thrown :
I cannot live ; I may not die ;
No more thy love ; no more thy own.’
A rustling tread, a parted bough,
A hateful face ;—alone I lay :
Full through the casement on my brow
Glared the broad mockery of the day.”

“ And did you actually dream all this ?”
said Tanṭawee.

“ All of it from beginning to end, the false
with the true, the fancied with the real,”

answered Hermann. "In the verses I have now recited there is not a word or a circumstance but was then present to me in my dream. I knew it for mere idle self-torture ; yet it was of evil omen ; and I felt it to be so, and did my best to shake it off, but could not. Let it be." With an effort he again went on.

"When I woke, the sun, shining in through the small window-aperture in the side wall and the half open door, stood considerably above the horizon. I was alone ; Aman had gone out in quest of milk, or perhaps merely to idle and gossip with the villagers ; the old woman, my hostess, did not appear. Moḥarib and his companions were in their tents. With a new feeling of loneliness, I went thither, hoping to find some indications of the departure which I now longed for feverishly ; but there too I met with no sign of stirring

for the day. One Arab lay stretched on the ground, negligently scratching it with a stick ; a second was smoking his *sebeel*;¹ a third was asleep. Moḥarib greeted me, and invited me to share in a bowl of half-dried dates that stood by, but seemed as little inclined to move as the rest. It was my first lesson in the apparent apathy of the Bedouin character, alternating with intense activity and prolonged endurance. I did not relish it, but had no remedy but to submit.

“A third day came, and, much to my annoyance, passed in precisely the same manner : I could neither understand the reasons of the delay, nor when it would be at an end. That evening, however, I learnt the cause from Moḥarib. There was danger on the road before us from some hostile tribes,

¹ The short tobacco-pipe common among Bedouins.

Seba'a and Fida'an he called them, with whose movements he and his men were evidently, how I could not divine, well acquainted ; and to have left Ra's-el-'Eyn sooner would have been useless rashness. But if the night brought, as he hoped it would, better news, we might safely begin our journey to Tell-'Afr on the following day.

“Next morning in fact we set out. My horse, now thoroughly rested and refreshed, bore me well ; and my companions, though fond of careering about, and making, what seemed to me, many unnecessary little excursions to right and left, kept on the whole a steady and not over-rapid pace. This was my first experience of Bedouins on their own ground, the ‘open’ or ‘desert’ ; and I was astonished by the contrast between the constraint and furtive timidity of their manners when within town-limits, and the careless

licence they assumed when fairly beyond them. 'Desert is liberty' says the proverb, and they did their best to illustrate it. High animal spirits, loud laughter, coarse jests, and horse-play of every kind were the order of the day. Some shouted out most unmusical verses, halt brag, half impertinence; others diverted themselves with practical jokes far from refined; all, except indeed Moḥarib and one black-bearded, harsh-featured man, Khalid by name, who seldom spoke and never laughed, behaved like boys just let out from school, and very ill-bred boys too.

"Though an adopted brother of the clan, there was still enough of the stranger about me to impose on my rough comrades a certain restraint where I was concerned; however, I came in for my part of the customary banter,—enough to have offended me had I not known that it was good-humouredly meant, and that

it would be foolish in me to take it otherwise. So I joined freely in the sport, and, as far as I could, paid it back in the same coin, This conduct procured me the advantage, if no other, of becoming more thoroughly acquainted with the dialect and other idiomatic peculiarities, as well as with the character and ways of the 'people of the desert.' Aman kept generally alongside of me; but it was surprising to see how naturally he fell in with the odd humour of the Bedouins, and how cordially on their part they took to him.

"We were five days on the route; the country was mostly either level, or only broken by long undulating ridges, with here and there an isolated mound rather than a hill; the ground, judging by the rich pasturage everywhere, though now partly dried up by the summer heat, must have been fertile; but except two small villages, each with its ill-

defined plot of indifferent tillage around it, there was no sign of cultivation. We passed several little streams, and two wide, but nearly waterless, river beds, else the landscape was monotonous enough ; trees there were hardly any, and the scrub bushes that occasionally took their place appeared all of the same kind.

“ Our march was a regular one : twice in every twenty-four hours we halted ; once in the morning, from a couple of hours or so after sunrise till noon, when it was the custom of the Bedouins to make a light meal, and indulge in a nap ; once again in the evening, somewhat after sunset till midnight. At the two villages however we came to a special halt, and were hospitably entertained ; the inhabitants were themselves half-Bedouins, 'Arab-Deerah,'¹ who had only lately exchanged

¹ Arabs freshly settled in permanent dwellings.

the pastoral for the agricultural form of life.

“What, however, most surprised me was the apparent absence of other Bedouins on our route ; though the district we were traversing was, I knew, the pasture-land of many tribes that cross and recross it in every direction. But here it was the same loneliness that I have subsequently often observed at sea ; where of the thousand ships sailing to and fro on the very line of voyage, not one is sighted often for days together ; so small is the proportion they bear to the vast space over which they go. In our case, however, I soon learned another cause of solitude : namely the anxiety of our band to elude hostile encounters,—for they had almost as many feuds on hand as there were clans to quarrel with,—and their consequent care to avoid, not meet, other wayfarers of their kind.

“Once only did a chance meeting take place ; and then those whom we fell in with were Arabs of Shomer, friends of the Benoo-Riah. Even thus the first greetings were not without suspicion ; and the two old matchlocks of our party were diligently loaded and primed at the first announcement of a horseman in sight. The Shomer, were however, bound for the west, on a foray against the 'Anezeh Bedouins, I think ; and their movements no way regarded us. But their keen glance at once detected and fastened on my foreign appearance ; and had I been in any other escort, I should hardly have escaped the stripping by which Bedouins are wont to levy duty on those who enter their territory without due warrant. As it was they saluted me guardedly and with a sort of respect ; but hardly addressed me a question, though their inquiries re-

garding me were numerous. I gathered thus much from their side glances towards me while they conversed with the others. The answers given contained, I fancy, more lies than truth.

“The morning of the fifth day dawned on us while we rode, slower than usual, over a perfectly level plain; when I noticed that our party, ten in all before, was now diminished to eight. I inquired, and learnt that two had gone on in advance to give notice at Tell-'Afr of our arrival. Soon the horizon to our front was narrowed in by the rising ground, and a conical hill of no great height indicated the goal of our journey. The abruptness of its outline, a feature shared by many of the banks and ridges hereabouts, gave it a semblance of being at a greater distance than it really was; and I was agreeably surprised to find

how quickly we approached it. We were soon engaged in the bewildering ups and downs of what seemed huge earth-waves in a random tempest; dark green patches indicated the presence of water, the ooziings of the hills; and the traces of cattle and men became more and more frequent. I asked whereabouts the encampment was. 'Near,' my guides answered; but I saw no sign, till on crossing a highish ridge I perceived half-way up the opposite side some sixty tents, black-dotted over the gray-green slope. They were high and low, large and small; one, two, three, and four-poled in length; most stood near each other arranged in lines; a few were scattered and apart. Among them went and came several figures of women in long dark blue robes; also a few men.

"Towards these tents we now directed

our way. Four horsemen issued forth to meet us, and interchanged with Moḥarib some of those brief questions and answers which constitute the freemasonry of the desert. We entered the encampment; and more than one tent-rope had nearly tripped up my horse's steps, more than one swarthy form had belied its apparent poverty by the offer of unlimited hospitality, before we reached a tent larger than the rest, but of the same dingy materials outside. Inside, however, I could see at a look that it was hung with striped cloth, carpeted, and even, after a fashion, furnished.

“At its door we dismounted. Moḥarib went in the first, making me a sign to follow; Aman, and three or four Bedouins, followed unbidden. Along one side of the tent ran a sort of divan, carpets and cushions only; saddle bags, copper utensils, and arms lined

the space. In the further corner of the tent, lay, rather than sat, an old man, white-bearded, wrinkled, and with dim eyes almost closed by the falling eye-lids, relaxed through age; his stature, while straight, must have been tall, and his limbs large before years had shrunk them. He was well,—indeed, for a Bedouin, richly—dressed, in a striped silk gown, red and white, with a bright-coloured silk handkerchief of many folds round his head; his under-garments, silk and linen, were stained with saffron. The general expression of his face was that of an old lion, yet good-humoured in its grimness; his forehead was broad and wrinkled; his complexion struck my eye as singularly white after the dusky sunburnt faces of those amongst whom I had lately been; perhaps too he was better washed. A small much-thumbed book in gilt binding, a section of

the K̄ur'an, lay near him ; his hand held a maple-wood pipe-stick ; he had evidently just put aside the former in favour of the latter.

“ Moḥarib approached and kissed the large wrinkled hand which his chief held out to him. Then sitting down on his heels close in front of the old man, he entered into a long talk, of which, owing to the undertone in which it was carried on, I could hear little ; though most of it, I believe, was about myself. Aboo-Zeyd, for by this name the aged chief was better known throughout the clan than by his proper appellation of Faris, listened attentively, and now and then made some remark. At the conclusion of the conference he beckoned Moḥarib towards him, and lifting up the young man's head-dress on one side, whispered in his ear ; the answer was given with similar

caution. All the while Aboo-Zeyd's eyes were fixed on me with a shrewdly searching glance that belied the dimness of age.

“He now beckoned to me. I came forward; saluted him as Moḥarib had done; and then, with one hand laid on the tent-pole close by, to denote my demand of his protection and help, related my story. He listened almost in silence, and with evident good-will; my manner and appearance pleased him, nor was the ‘substance of my request far from his own inclinations. When I had finished, I again took his hand and kissed it. ‘Let your fear subside, and your heart be at rest; you have obtained your desire,’ he said. The tent was now nearly full of men, who had entered one after the other during this interview. ‘Be witnesses all of you,’ said the old chief, addressing them, ‘that we have given our protection to this

Ahmed the Bagdadee. He is one of us, and our brother ; his enemy is our enemy, his friend our friend ; and his desire our care.' 'We are witnesses,' was answered by all.

"This sufficed ; nor during the twenty days longer that I remained among the tents did the Emeer Faris ever make a second allusion to the object of my coming. But we often conversed together on other topics ; for Aboo-Zeyd was very curious to hear all that I could tell him about Bagdad, Diar-Bekr, and the other towns thereabouts. He had, years before, visited them all himself, and his memory was wonderfully retentive. He even showed himself partial to my company ; and, I have no doubt, exercised all his influence,—the chief of a Bedouin clan has no authority, properly speaking,—with the tribe in my behalf.

"While at Tell 'Afr I in a way completed

my schooling in Bedouin life, and was astonished at the narrowness of its ordinary range. Camels, sheep, and horses, formed the staple of the thoughts, the talk, and, so to speak, of the existence of those around me ; where the best pastures for the different times of year, or, as they expressed themselves, the rising of such and such a star, were to be found ; how this camel had strayed, that one been found ; who owned this horse or that ; of the foal of that mare ; and so on, without end, like one monotonous air played on a scrannel pipe. Next came raids, forays, quarrels, makings-up ; but in nine-tenths of these too the beasts rescued or carried off played in the narration a much more conspicuous part than the skill or prowess of the men themselves.

“ Boasting and bragging there was indeed, and enough ; but all of an isolated and indi-

vidual character, there was evidently little cohesion in the tribe itself; and none, or next to none, between it and others.

“Eating was another favourite topic; love-adventures too, but very unromantic and animal the most. Of religion there seemed slight care: a few said their prayers, that is when the fancy took them; the greater number absolutely ignored them. Nor did the prevalent coarseness of manners and bluntness of feeling that I could not but observe in most, please me; morals too appeared lax, at least in words; and the sentiment of honour, keen on some points, was oddly wanting on others.

“Yet the basis of character was good, frank, and manly; the intellect active, the perceptions acute, the judgment sound. But these better qualities were, in far the most instances, stunted, and often in a manner

blighted, by the mere savageness of life; and the circle of thought contracted, till apparently incapable of expansion. ‘Good materials,’ said I to myself, ‘but spoilt or wasted in the using.’

“The Benoo-Riah among whom I was, numbered in all between three and four hundred fighting men; one hundred or rather more, were provided with horses, the others rode on camels. But though few in number, and not wealthy, even for Bedouins, they stood high for reputation of bravery; long-headed too and crafty, they were feared more than many much larger clans. Moreover, they were a branch of the great ‘Adwan stock, and as such connected by blood or ancient usage with powerful allies, chiefly of the southerly districts. Their own ordinary places of summer resort were, as now, in the north; but when winter came

they were in the habit of migrating to the neighbourhood of Samarra, on the lower Euphrates, where they had pasture-lands in common with the Shomer Bedouins, their constant friends.

“Rather more than half the tribe were present in the encampment of Tell’Afr; and though the men generally absented themselves for short distances, in the day-time, on such desultory occupations as pastoral life affords, they seldom failed to return for supper in the evening. Then would follow, in the cool night air outside the tents, interminable conversations of the kind I have already described, now and then diversified by poetical recitations or story-telling, till any hour, however late; for the habit of frequent sleep during the day renders Bedouins very independent of the prolonged night rest usual among the

more regular inhabitants of towns and villages."

"From all that you say," observed Ṭanṭawee, I should hardly think that a Bedouin life had much place in your projects of a future for yourself and your bride."

"No ; certainly not ;" replied Hermann ; "it could neither have suited her nor me. There is indeed a real pleasure in its physical freedom ; but the price at which it has to be bought, the sacrifice of civilized comfort and of intellectual activity, is too high for deliberate option. For those born and bred among tents, camels, and sheep, such an existence is well enough—at any rate so long as they know no other ; yet I have seldom seen a Bedouin otherwise than discontented with his own lot, after he has once become acquainted with the world of fields and gardens, houses and towns."

“Did Moḥarib never propose to you anything of the sort, however?” continued the Egyptian. “You, as a client and brother of the tribe, must, I should think, have had some such offers made you.”

“He did,” replied his friend; “and so did the Emeer Faris, and others. Indeed a definite number of sheep and camels were placed at my disposal, had I chosen to make it a bargain; and I might have easily been on a footing with the best of the clan. But the offer was not to my taste, and I evaded it; subsequent reflection has only the more convinced me that I was right in my decision.”

“Yet there are fine fellows among these Arabs of the pasture-lands,” rejoined Tanṭawee,—men of courage, tact, and good sense, with whom there must be pleasure in associating; poets too, eloquent speakers, full of imagination and thought; women, also, of no

common energy and intelligence, besides beauty, they say. In fact, we town-Arabs regard these very Bedouins as our fountain-head, and consider what brilliant qualities we ourselves possess, to be derived from them. More than this, it is to them, as to a standard, we refer, when we apprehend any falling off from ancestral excellence on our own part; and by their example we try to correct the degeneracy of our more artificial ways, and to renew the freshness of our type. Your blood-brother Moḥarib seems to have been a better specimen of a genuine Arab than town-walls usually contain; the old Emeer Faris, too, I dare say; and such men could hardly be mere exceptions, or prodigies rather, either among the Benoo-Riaḥ or other tribes. I should more readily suppose them samples, picked ones, certainly, yet in the main not unlike the rest in the heap."

“ True,” replied Hermann, “ you have judged correctly. But this is exactly a proof of what I myself said, that the substratum of character is good, excellent indeed ; only, in nineteen instances out of twenty nothing is built on it, because the surroundings furnish nothing wherewith to build. Narrow interests, petty aims, unsettled habits, discomfort, want, may not absolutely destroy a superior nature ; but they warp it, cramp it, thwart it, till it becomes a mere possibility of unfulfilled promise ; a stunted and fruitless growth. Education, order, and even comfort, are, I see, not less necessary to the development of man, than air, water, and sunlight are to that of a plant. Some indeed struggle through and flourish after a fashion ; some higher-natured than ordinary, and favoured by outer circumstances, attain perfection ; but not many. Of these was my poor brother Moharib ;

whose faculties, early and intense passion, well bestowed, stimulated into a fulness which subsequent chances of life maintained and strengthened."

"How was that?" asked Ṭanṭawee; "did he never tell you the past story of his love and life? you alluded to it, if I remember, before."

Hermann was about to reply; but even then a touch of air, cooler and brisker than they had yet felt, blew off the shore and swept the deck; then died away.

"Midnight is past," said he; "that is the land-wind, and morning is not far off. If I begin with Moḥarib's history, there will be no time left for finishing mine; indeed, tell it as briefly as I can, I must abridge somewhat, or else leave it to another day."

"Abridge then," answered the Beg, "but

at all events relate the end of your adventure; I cannot suppose that having once got so far, you abandoned your dangerous and not over-lawful scheme without putting it to the test."

Hermann sighed, and resumed.

"During the twenty days that we remained in the tents of Benoo-Riah, Moḥarib busied himself right and left in enlisting companions to our enterprise; the number of eligible men then present at Tell-'Afr was small; and of these again many declined sharing in an undertaking that promised more wounds and danger than booty or profit. However, nine at last consented; Moḥarib, Aman,—who from the day he found me in the cottage at Ra's-el-'Eyn has never left me,—and myself made up the band to twelve.

"The Riahees were as follows: First Ja'ad, a man of middle age, brave and enduring;

surnamed Ja'ad es-Sabāsib¹ from his skill in discovering tracks, invisible to ordinary eyes, across the widest desert.

“Next Ḥarīth, a wiry mulatto; his mother was a negress; a perfect devil in a fray; he was short and thick-built, his age about twenty-five.

“Then Ḥoweyrith, half-brother of the former, by an Arab mother, a handsome lad, fair for a Bedouin; he was scarce twenty years old, but had already taken part in many a raid.

“Fourthly, Musa'ab, a ruddy cheerful fellow, fond of jokes and satirical verses; a genuine Riaḥee scapegrace, and the life of our party.

“Fifthly, Doheym, bright-eyed and dark-complexioned; his mother was of the Benoo-'Aḍra clan.² He spoke little; but was a

¹ Plural of the Arab word *sabsad*, “a pathless waste.”

² A southern tribe, natives of Yemen.

good poet, and a desperate fighter. Moḥarib and he were great friends.

“The others, Sa’ad, Moḍarrib, Do’eyj, and Shebeeb, were all picked men, young, and spirited; Shebeeb was a negro, and naturally he and Aman soon became sworn brothers.

“All had swords, lances, and knives; but, except my two pistols, which, though adopting in other respects the same dress and weaponry as my companions, I still retained, there were no fire-arms in our band. My carbine I had made a present of to the headman of Ra’s-el-’Eyn; he had evidently desired it, and I could not refuse a token of gratitude for the protection and hospitality shown me in the village.

“But I must hasten on. How we made our scanty preparations for the fifteen days of journey before us; how we took leave of the Emeer Faris,—good old man,—and

our comrades of the encampment; how some of the women wept at the departure of their husband or brothers, while others stood by and encouraged us with shrill cries and words of good omen; how before noon we mounted our horses and rode away from Tell-'Afr; how I turned back, with an unexpected feeling of regret, to have a last look at its black tents and grazing camels, I need not relate at length. Yet each incident of that time is fresh in my mind with pleasant memories; and each one tells of what was, and what might have been, but is not. Well; we crossed the great Mesopotamian plain, once so thickly-peopled, they say, now so lonely, till we fell in with the Euphrates at Heet;¹ the river was fordable at this point, and we crossed it

¹ An Arab village, near the supposed site of Babylon.

without difficulty. We then followed its course by marsh and desert, down to Samowa,¹ and, a little farther, came to a thriving village called Showey'rat, situated by a canal that branched off from the main river, and an ordinary market-resort of the Bedouins in the neighbourhood. Here we halted, and waited tidings of the expected caravan.

“ Two days we rested; the villagers, for whom a visit from rovers of the Benoo-Riah was no novelty, gave us welcome and shelter, and discreetly asked no questions. Meanwhile Ja'ad rode away to an encampment of the Mountefik Bedouins,² at some hours' distance, in search of news.

¹ A town on the lower Euphrates, at about half-distance between Bagdad and Baṣrah.

² A numerous and powerful tribe which still frequents these parts.

“The third morning he returned, and gave us the wished-for intelligence. The Sheybanee caravan, with the Emeer Daghfel at its head, would pass a good way off westward of Showey’rat in the course of the next day. On hearing this, we, that is, Moḥarib, Ja’ad, Ḥarith, Ḥoweyrith, Doheym, and myself, went out together among the dry hillocks beyond the village walls, and there held long counsel. After much discussion of the when and how, it was resolved that we should set forth on a cross track that very night.

“Eagerly as I had longed for this decisive moment, I felt, now that it was really near, a seriousness, a sobering, so to speak, of my whole self, body and mind, that I had never felt before. It was not hesitation, though what the result of the next day’s daring might be no one could tell; still less was it fear, though I knew that myself and every

man of us held his life in his hand ; it was cool absolute resolve ; it was the strain of being in deadly earnest. All the possible consequences came mustered before me in one glance, and I dared them all. Now or never ; win her I would, or die at her feet. Even her risk,—and, ah ! it was really much more serious than my selfish love imagined,—seemed swallowed up in my own great resolution. While life was in me, no harm should approach her ; if I perished,—but this thought I was unable to follow up further. And it was well so ; nothing else could have unnerved my arm or chilled my heart, but apprehension for her ; and that, fortunately for myself I did not realize ; it was like a thing impossible. Hope ruled the hour ; and as the day declined, my spirits rose, till I had need of more than common self-control to wait the tardy night, and the signal for starting.

“Well do I remember that afternoon at Showey’rat, when we had returned from the outside hillocks, our deliberation over, and all determined and settled. Most of our band had dispersed themselves, to wander till evening should come, here and there in the streets of the village, chaffering, loitering, or sleeping. Moḥarib and I, followed by Aman only, had gone aside into a mud-walled garden inclosure by the canal; the ground within was overrun with great green melon-plants; palms and fruit-trees grew as chance, seemingly, had planted them; one whole side of the place was occupied by a vineyard, loosely trailed along high perches, or clinging to the tree-stems near. The sun still flamed high in the dark blue heaven of the south; but the leaves of plant and tree, water-fed from the neighbouring canal, though dust-powdered, were vigorous and fresh;

there was no sign of drooping in their abundant verdure.

“Sheltered from the burning heat by a vine-canopy of half-transparent green, Moḥarib and I lay stretched, with ripe bunches of white grapes hanging above and around us, pleasant to eye, taste, and smell. Indeed, Aman’s enjoyments were, I think, bounded by the alternate eating of grapes, and of a huge water-melon, from which he had already cut some considerable slices, and kept on cutting more. Thus occupied, he paid little attention to us, or to anything else, perfectly satisfied with present pleasure. Perhaps, the unreflecting mind is, on the whole, the happiest of all.

“But Moḥarib and I, now seated, now reclined, under the warm green shade, left grapes and melons untouched on their stalks. Our feast was in the talk of that nearest the

heart of each,—of love past and love to come,—till remembrance and anticipation almost equalled actual presence. I told my story,—the story you now know,—recalling to view every happy scene, every fair picture, in its own bright colour, heightened by the prismatic hues of fond remembrance ; and in every picture, every scene, she was the centre figure, the source of all beauty and joy around, the light of life.

“ Then Moḥarib took up the word, and related with all the eloquence that a lover’s tongue and a lover’s heart can supply, his own tale of love. He spoke of the girl whom first he met when, a lad of barely twelve, he had gone accompanying his mother on a visit to her acquaintances in a neighbouring encampment of the Benoo-’Adra’ tribe. He described her perfect beauty, her simple kindliness, her unadorned grace ; he

told his own feelings, the first dawn of love, the few words exchanged, the smile at parting ; the subsequent loneliness of the return homewards to the tents of Benoo-Riah. He told how their mutual affections, hers and his, kindled that day in the valley of Soley,¹ grew and strengthened by frequent meetings at well, or on pasture-ground, till it attracted the notice of unfriendly kinsmen on either side ; the opposition of parents, the jealousy of rivals. He told of the barriers that spite and envy attempted to raise up between her and him ; the efforts made to shake her constancy ; and, these failing the devices used to trick him into the belief that she had ceased to care for him ; while he all the while knew well, with the certainty that answered love alone can give, that her love

¹ Between Nejd and Yemen.

equalled his, or exceeded; and that it was the love which can be quenched by death alone, nor even by death.

“Thus he went on, dwelling lingeringly on every circumstance, reviewing every outward or inward memory, his and hers; and suffusing all with the purple halo of deep love, till he came to their last meeting by the well of Jowfa¹ in the early spring of the year; the pledges they interchanged, the vows they spoke, the tears they shed, the embrace, the parting look, the threats of their kinsfolk, their own unalterable resolve.

“‘An old story, Aḥmed, brother,’ said he; ‘but ever new; mine as yours, yours as mine. Hear then my tale, and take it for your own; my grief is your grief, my pain your pain; my hope your hope. True love is

¹ On the frontier of Kaseem, near Nejd.

one only, and has but one voice as one heart.'
So saying, he leant his back against the
vineyard wall, and sang:—

“ ‘It cannot be, it cannot be
That I should gain by losing thee.
They threat, they promise much, but all
Their threat is weak, their promise small.
What were my loss, so thou be won?
Or what my gain, if thou art gone?
What can the gathered world supply
Of bliss, if thou no more be nigh?
Where shall I find the love that erst
Made earth a heaven? that love, the first,
The only love, the ecstasy.
I knew not whether mine or thine;
For I was thou, and thou wert I,
Two tangled life-threads, one the twine :—
It cannot be, it cannot be,
That I should gain by losing thee.’

“ He paused; then went on with his song :—

“ ‘It cannot be, it cannot be
That I should gain by losing thee.
Were all the love that ever glowed
In all men’s hearts on thee bestowed;
Of every mine were every gem
For thee wrought in one diadem;
Of every realm were every throne
Step to thy feet, and thine alone,—

The total value of the earth
Were nothing to thy single worth.
For thine the unsullied pearl of youth,
The treasure of a faithful heart ;
And thine the crown of changeless truth,
And these are thine, and these thou art :—
It cannot be, it cannot be
That I should gain by losing thee.'

"Again he paused; then resumed in a voice almost broken by the intensity of longing passion, as though striving to reach what he could neither express nor attain :—

"It cannot be, it cannot be
That I should gain by losing thee.
Life is no life if thou remove,
And death no death if in thy love.
Oh, sundered far, yet ever near
Thy form I see, thy voice I hear;
By trackless waste, o'er far hill-line,
Thy gentle hand is laid in mine ;
Warm to my lips thy lips are pressed,
Clasped in thy arms my nightly rest ;—
And health, and wealth, and name, and fame,
And heaven's own hopes, and God's own bliss,
I'd give them all, nor blame nor shame,
For thy one smile, for thy one kiss :—
It cannot be, it cannot be—
Whate'er I lose, I lose not thee !

“He ended, but remained seated as he was, gazing before him into distance, saying nothing. I too was silent : each of us had his own thoughts ; and the thoughts of each were, in likelihood, much the same.

“‘Enough,’ at last I broke in ; ‘lose her we will not, by God’s help, neither I nor you. Only one thing, my brother, I conjure you ; tell me this : How I can help you in attaining the desire of your heart, as you are now helping me. Be sure I will stand by you to the utmost, and never fail you ; it is the least that I can do in your requital, and God to witness above us both.’

“‘You speak as you would perform, and generously,’ he answered. ‘But, Aḥmed, have no care ; she and I shall soon, without help of friends, have reached what we long for, where we shall stand in need of nothing but the favour of the One, the Merciful.’

“‘How can that be?’ I asked. ‘What do your words mean?’

“‘They mean,’ he replied, ‘that when you are happy in the possession of her you love, all I ask of you is to remember your brother who died to win for you that which he could not attain for himself.’ Then, after a short silence, ‘My brother,’ said he, ‘my hour is come, and I know it; I shall never return alive from the expedition on which we set out to-night. But when in after-days you revisit the place that is already prepared for me, and the heap of stones that will soon be piled over me, salute me by name, the brother of Leyla, the lover of Hafsah, and wish me peace. I shall hear you, though I make no answer. She too will visit me, and will be with me before long.’

“I thought him wandering in his mind. ‘My brother,’ I said, ‘this is mere fancy,

idle dreams; let them go. Each of us has his appointed time, but God alone knows it. May He grant you a long life, and to find what you seek. Neither you nor I are the first who have loved; and why should you be less fortunate than so many others have been?’

“‘She asked my promise,’ he answered, ‘and I gave it; she has called me, and I have answered; within two days it will be as I have said, nor would I have it otherwise. I am content with what has been decreed.’

“He was looking down on the ground while he spoke thus; when he had finished, he lifted up his face. I looked at it, and saw that it was flushed, burning red; his eyes shone so that I could not bear their glitter, and his breath was panting and thick. Then he stretched out his arms

eagerly, as if to some one far off; but soon dropped them again, leant back in his place, raised his voice and sung,—

“O love ! love ! love ! one hour to be
As once I was ; one hour with thee,
My only love ! when in thy smile
I knew my life, nor deemed the while
That ought could part my love from me !

‘O love ! love ! love ! one hour to stand
As once we stood, when hand in hand
’Neath the lone palms,—and none was by
Our troth to see, but God’s own sky
In starry witness o’er the land.

‘O love ! love ! love ! one hour to rest,
Kisses to kisses, breast to breast ;
Thy breast, thy kisses !—O my heart !
Be still ; in life thou hast no part,
Of love so lightly dispossessed !

‘O love ! love ! love ! O loved in vain !
Too late the hope, too late the pain ;
Too late ! too late ! O idle breath !
It may not be ;—come life, come death,
Thou must, thou shalt be mine again !’

“With a sob that seemed as if body and soul had parted, he fell forward on his face

to the ground. I went up to him, called him, took him by the arm, moved him, but to no purpose ; he was insensible. Aman came to my help ; we fetched water in haste from the deep stream running close outside the garden-wall, and poured it over his head and breast. After some time he opened his eyes. 'Leave me, my brothers,' he whispered in a voice only just audible, 'till the sun is down ; then return.'

"We left him. I went into the village, and strayed about till the evening call,¹ when I entered the low, white-washed mosque, and said my prayers : somewhat to the surprise of the good folks of the place, who were unaccustomed to see a Bedouin, such as they took me for, so accurate in his devotions. Aman and I then returned to

¹ The 'Idan, or call to prayer, immediately after sunset.

the garden by the canal. There we found Moḥarib almost at the same spot where we had quitted him, but he took no immediate notice of our approach; he had spread his garment out on the dust, and was saying his prayers, standing, and making no prostration."

"The prayers of the dead, I suppose," observed Ṭanṭawee; "may God have mercy on him. Yet I have known many who have said those very prayers under exactly the same impression, and then have lived comfortably for years after. Presentiments of this kind are quite as often false as true."

"In his case it was not so," answered Hermann; "he never said those prayers again,¹ nor any other stated ones. What

¹ Mahometans, in their burial-prayer over the dead, make no prostration; the omission is intended to be significant of the coming resurrection. A man who

however, was the cause of his foreboding, and whence it came, I do not know ; he said nothing to explain it, and I did not like to ask him."

"And you, Aḥmed, had you no similar anticipations at the time for yourself?" inquired Ṭanṭawee, with a something ironical in the tone of his voice.

"None whatever," replied Hermann ; "though if warnings like these were merely the creation of fear, conjecture, fancy, or what not, as some say, I might well then have experienced them. But no ; it is a feeling which one can no more conjure up in one's self at will, than ignore it when it really comes. It is a voice that we cannot make speak by hearkening for it ; so too

expects shortly to die a violent death will not unfrequently recite these very prayers, as if over himself, by way of preparation or anticipation.

neither can we help hearing it when it does speak, only the speaker remains unknown and hid."

"You are a superstitious young fellow," half-laughed the other; "though I can hardly blame you for it: as a child you were probably educated to a belief in these things, and later circumstances seem to have confirmed you in it. Turks and Koordes are much given to these fancies; so are Arabs and Bedouins too, though after a different fashion; and associating with them as you have done, you, who are already over-imaginative of yourself, could scarcely fail to catch something of their turn of mind. But have a care, lad, and do not lay too much stress on presentiments, dreams, voices, and the like; wiser men than you have been made fools of in this way before now."

"I do not pretend to understand these

things," said Hermann; "nor do I take them into account, or draw conclusions from them. But I cannot doubt the truth of what I have myself experienced, or seen experienced by others. It would be, I think, unreasonable to refuse to our senses, in one particular class of objects, the credit which we allow them in the remainder. Who, or to what purpose the Hatif¹ may be, I know not; but I find everywhere those who bear witness to his existence; and their testimony corresponds to what I have heard or felt in my own person. So too with presentiments, so with dreams. Besides, when real, they have a character of their own, even independently of the confirmation or meaning they may seem to receive from subsequent events,—a character well-known to those who have felt their

¹ See above in Part I., page 147.

influence, but impossible to describe by words to those who have not.

“Why, indeed,” continued he, “should we suppose our will and intelligence to be alone in their kind, or that the spiritual powers which we recognise in ourselves have no separate existence in other forms without us and around us? The appearances on which men’s belief in Hatif, Jinnee, and the like, in the occasional truth of a presentiment or a dream are based, are not less objective after their kind than are those of the stars now over our heads, and the masts and ropes beside us. Some might say that even these are illusions, modes of perception, and no more. Be it so : but in the meanwhile we must hold for reality that which is reality to us ; and the things of which we are speaking are real exactly in the same manner, though the ultimate base of their reality be

not better known to us than that of everything else."

"All this may be true," replied the Egyptian; "but to me one thing is clear: that impressions of this kind, whether made through the mind or the senses, are merely exceptions, and meant to be regarded as such. They resist every attempt to bring them under rule and system, and belong to something that has no bearing on our normal and reasonable life. Here again the son of 'Abd-Allah,¹ was right in his summary rejection of them; though he too seems to have had occasional weaknesses, the consequence, probably, of early associations, in this respect.² But they who, like the

¹ The prophet Mahomet.

² "Ghosts, apparitions, and the like, have nothing to do with Islam," is an authentic saying of Mahomet's; who was, however, sometimes rather credulous, especially about omens.

magicians of my own country, profess to have them at command, are rank impostors. The invisible powers, whether spirits of the dead, or other, even if they do keep up now and then a kind of connection with the living, are certainly not at their beck. To profess the contrary is to be a knave, and to believe it, a fool.

“The subject, however, is a wide one,” he added; “and if we once begin to discuss it in earnest, we shall make an end not of the night only, but of the day after too. So pray return to the course of your story.”

“I would have done so before now,” rejoined Hermann, “had not yourself introduced this topic, one which I for my part do not like to talk much about; it is an unhealthy one.” He swallowed a draught of water from the pitcher on the deck, and resumed.

“When Moḥarib had ended his prayer, he took up his cloak, shook it, threw it over his shoulders, and then turned towards us with his ordinary look and manner, in which no trace of past emotion could be discerned. We all left the garden together ; there was plenty of occupation for every one in getting himself, his horse, his weapons, and his travelling gear, ready for the night and the morrow. Our gathering-place was behind a dense palm-grove that cut us off from the view and observation of the village ; there our comrades arrived, one after another, all fully equipped, till the whole band of twelve had re-assembled. The cry of the night prayers proclaimed from the mosque roof had long died away into silence ; the last doubtful streak of sunset faded from the west, accompanied by the thin white crescent of the young moon ; night, still cloudless,

and studded with innumerable stars, depth over depth, reigned alone. Without a word we set forth into what seemed the trackless expanse of desert, our faces between west and south; the direction across which the Emeer Dagħfel and his caravan were expected to pass.

“More than ever did the caution now manifested by my companions, who were better versed than myself in adventures of the kind, impress me with a sense, not precisely of the danger, but of the seriousness, of the undertaking. Two of the Benoo-Riaħ, Ĥarīth, and Moḍarrib, whom the tacit consent of the rest designated for that duty, took the advance as scouts, riding far out ahead into the darkness, sometimes on the right, sometimes on the left, in order that timely notice might be given to the rest of us, should any chance meeting or suspicious

obstacle occur on the way. A third, Ja'ad es-Sabāsib himself, acted, as beseemed his name, for guide ; he rode immediately in front of our main body. The rest of us held close together, at a brisk walking pace, from which we seldom allowed our beasts to vary ; indeed, the horses themselves, trained to the work, seemed to comprehend the necessity of cautiousness, and stepped on warily and noiselessly.

“ Every man in the band was dressed alike. Though I retained, I had carefully concealed my pistols ; the litham¹ disguised my foreign features, and to any superficial observer, especially at night, I was merely a Bedouin of the tribe, with my sword at my side, and my lance couched, Benoo-Riah

¹ A fold of the head-dress, drawn across the whole lower face up to the eyes.

fashion, alongside of my horse's right ear. Not a single word was uttered by any one of the band, as, following Ja'ad's guidance, who knew every inch of the ground, to my eyes utterly unmeaning and undistinguishable, we glided over the dry plain. At another time I might perhaps have been inclined to ask questions, but now the nearness of expectation left no room for speech. Besides, I had been long enough among the men of the desert to have learnt from them their habit of invariable silence when journeying by night. Talkative at other times, they then become absolutely mute. Nor is this silence of theirs merely a precaution due to the insecurity of the road, which renders it unadvisable for the wayfarer to give any superfluous token of his presence; it is quite as much the result of a powerful, though it may well be most often an unconscious,

sympathy with the silence of nature around.

“ Silent overhead, the bright stars, moving on, moving upwards from the east, constellation after constellation, the Twins and the Pleiads, Aldeboran and Orion, the Spread and the Perching Eagle,¹ the Balance, the once-worshipped Dog-Star, and beautiful Canopus. I look at them till they waver before my fixed gaze ; and, looking, calculate by their position how many hours of our long night-march have already gone by, and how many yet remain before daybreak ; till the spaces between them show preternaturally dark ; and on the horizon below a false eye-begotten shimmer gives a delusive semblance of dawn ; then vanishes.

“ Silent : not the silence of voices alone, but the silence of meaning change, dead mid-

¹ “ Lyra ” in Western astronomy.

night. The Wolf's Tail,¹ has not yet shot up its first slant harbinger of day in the east; the quiet progress of the black spangled heavens is monotonous as mechanism; no life is there. Silence; above, around, no sound, no speech. The very cry of a jackal, the howl of a wolf, would come friendly to the ear, but none is heard; as though all life had disappeared for ever from the face of the land. Silent everywhere. A dark line stretches thwart before us; you might take it for a ledge, a trench, a precipice, what you will. It is none of these; it is only a broad streak of brown withered herb, drawn across the faintly gleaming flat. Far off on the dim right rises something like a black giant wall. It is not that: it is a thick-planted grove of palms; silent

¹ "Deneb Sirhān," the Arab name for the zodiacal light, very marked in these regions, especially towards autumn.

they also, and motionless in the night. On the left glimmers a range of white ghost-like shapes : they are the rapid slopes of sandhills shelving off into the plain ; no life is there.

“Some men are silenced by entering a place of worship, a grave-yard, a large and lonely hall, a deep forest ; and in each and all of these there is what brings silence, though from different motives, varying in the influence they exert over the mind. But that man must be strangely destitute of the sympathies which link the microcosm of our individual existence with the macrocosm around us, who can find heart for a word more than needful, were it only a passing word, in the desert at night.

“Silent we go on ; the eyes and thoughts of the Bedouins are fixed, now on the tracks, for there are many, barely distinguishable to a few yards before them through the gloom ; now on the pebble-strewn surface

beneath their horses' hoofs ; at times on some bright particular star near the horizon ; while occasionally they turn an uneasy glance to right or left, as though half anticipating some unfriendly figure about to start out of the gloom. Moḥarib rode generally alongside of Ja'ad, with whom he exchanged, but not often, signs or low whispers ; Aman kept close to me. I, who had long before made a separate astral calculation for each successive night of the year (a useful amusement in my frequent journeys), and for whom almost every star has a tale to tell of so many hours elapsed since sunset, so many remaining to the dawn, continue gazing on the vault above, also thinking. Our horses' pace never varies ; no new object breaks the monotonous gloom of our narrow horizon ; the night seems as though it had no end ; we all grow drowsy, and go on as if in an evil dream.

“’Aman draws forth from the loose breast-folds of his dress a small clay pipe. The elegant workmanship of the bowl, and the blue ornaments of its rim declare it to be of Moşool manufacture. Aided more by feeling than by sight, he proceeds deliberately to fill it from a large tobacco pouch, made of cloth, once gaily embroidered, now sadly stained and tarnished ; carefully arranging the yellow ’Irak tobacco (the only quality obtainable south of Bagdad, and of which we had laid in the necessary store at Showey’rat), with the coarse broken stalks undermost, and the fine dust-like leaf particles for a covering above. Next, with a single blow on the flint, he strikes a light, lays it delicately on the top, replaces the wire-work cupola over the pipe’s mouth, and smokes like a man who intends to make the most of his enjoyment, and who economizes his pleasure that it may last the longer.

“ He is not long alone in this proceeding ; for whether seeking a remedy against sleepiness, or ennui, or perhaps both, Musa’ab quickens his pace a little, and bringing his horse alongside of Aman’s, asks for a light in his turn. But his pipe is not all for himself, Howeyrith claiming a share in it ; whilst the negro, Shebeeb, considers his complexion sufficient warrant for taking a pull in company with Aman. I myself, though a minute before absent, or nearly so, from everything around in thought, am aroused from my reverie by the pleasant smell of the smoke, and ask also for a light, which Aman gives me. All the others, Ja’ad and Moḥarib alone excepted, follow the example.

“ The night-air freshens, it blows from the east. Looking round somewhat backward on our left we see a faint yellow gauze of light, a spear-shaped ray ; it is the zodiacal har-

binger of the sun. It widens, it deepens,—for brighten that dull ray does not,—and the hope it permits of a nearer halt arouses us one and all from our still recurring torpor. The air grows cooler yet ; the kaffeeyehs¹ are rearranged around each chin, and the mantles, some black, some striped, some dusky red, are wrapt closer to every form.

“Suddenly, almost startling in that suddenness, the morning-star flashes up, exactly in the central base of the dim eastern pyramid of nebulous outline. Sa’ad, Doheym, Musa’ab, myself, all of us instinctively look first at the pure silver drop, glistening over the dark desert-marge, and then at Ja’ad, as though entreating him to notice it also, and to take the hint it gives. He rides on and makes no

¹ Handkerchiefs, silk, cotton, or mixed, and generally of gay colours, worn largely by Bedouins for their sole head-covering.

sign. Yet half an hour more of march ; during which time the planet of my love¹ has risen higher and higher, with a rapidity seemingly disproportionate to the other stars ; and through the doubtful twilight I see Ḥarīth and Moḍarrib, our night-long outriders, nearing and falling in with the rest of our party. They know we have not much farther to go. Before us a low range of sand-heaps, already tinged above with something of a reddish reflect, on which the feathery ghaḍa² grows in large dusky patches, points out the spot where Ja'ad had determined hours before should be our brief morning rest. Once arrived among the hillocks, Ja'ad reconnoitres them closely, then draws rein and dismounts ; we all do the same ; I mechanically.

¹ “Zahra',” is the Arab name for the planet Venus, or morning-star.

² A kind of euphorbia, common in the Arabian desert.

“The horses are soon picketed, one close by the other ; there is no fear of vicious kicking or biting among these high-bred animals. Next, leaving only the cloths that have served for saddles on their backs, we lighten them of their remaining loads : an easy task ; for except two pair of small water-skins, and a few almost empty saddle-bags, more tassel than contents, there is not much to relieve them of.

“Aman, thoroughly tired with the night’s march, and little troubled by cares either for the future or the present, had quickly scooped away the soft cool sand into a comfortable hollow, arranged a heap of it for a pillow, and in half a minute lay there asleep and motionless like one dead. The other Benoo-Riahees did the same. Ja’ad and Moḥarib first made up for their previous abstinence by smoking each a half-filled pipe, then fol-

lowed the general example. For a few minutes longer I sat, the unbidden watchman of the party, looking at them ; sighed ; looked again ; soon I felt my ideas growing confused, and hastily clearing away in my turn somewhat of the sand, took my saddle-bags, folded them, laid them under my head, and almost instantly fell into dreamless slumber.

“ My sleep could not have lasted a full hour when with a shiver, so freshly blew the easterly breeze of the morning, I awoke. Rising I drew round me the woollen cloak which had fallen away on one side, leaving me partly uncovered in my uneasy though heavy sleep, and sat up. I looked about me, first at my comrades : they all lay yet slumbering, every one his spear stuck into the sand at his head, rolled up in their cloaks, some one way, some another ; then at the narrow belt of sandhills among which we had alighted

in the gloaming. They circled us in at forty or fifty yards distant on every side. The clear rays of the early sun entered the hollow here and there through gaps between the hillocks ; but on most points they were still shut out, and the level light silvered rather than gilded the sand-margin around. Except my own, not an eye was open, not a limb stirred : the very horses were silent and motionless as their masters.

“ ‘Am I nearer to or further than ever from my hopes ?’ said I to myself, as I gazed at the pure blue sky above me, the heaped-up sand below, the tufted ghaḍa on the slopes, the sleeping men, and the patient drooping horses ; ‘and to what purpose is all this ? Fool ! and a fool’s errand !—no ;—anyhow love is love, and life life : better to attempt and lose than never to attempt at all. Poor Moḥarib too ! on a venture not his own. I

wonder what his presentiments betoken; I feel none. No hint of to-day's future or to-morrow's. And she meanwhile—where is she at this very moment? near or far? and does she expect me now? has she any information of our intent? any guess? and how shall I find her when we meet? But shall we indeed meet? and how? If this attempt fail, what remains? Lucky fellows,' thought I, with a look on the heavy-breathing Aman and Harith where they lay side by side. 'They at least have all the excitement of the enterprise without any of the distressful anxieties; or, rather, without that one great, miserable anxiety, what is the end.'

"While thus I sat and thought, the Bedouins awoke, Ja'ad first of all. One roused another; they rubbed their eyes, and looked staringly around them. Moḥarib gave me the greeting of the morning, and added,

‘We have not far to go now.’ With scarcely a word, every one looked at his horse, and rearranged his travelling gear; the beasts were then unpicketed, and we remounted for our onward journey. A couple of hours before us, said Ja’ad, was a spring, where we could water our horses; there, too, I knew by former experience of like cases, we should make some kind of breakfast. Gladly I allow would I even now have prolonged the halt a few minutes longer for but a cup of coffee; this was, however, a luxury of which I well knew the idea must be renounced on a journey with Bedouins in the desert. So, in company with most of the others, I made a pipe do duty for what was of necessity omitted.

“After the time announced by Ja’ad, we came on the promised spring of water; a scantily supplied pool amid a patch of short

grass, through which the rock cropped out at intervals. The water was slightly brackish, and almost tepid ; yet we drank of it eagerly, men and beasts. Here, too, we breakfasted on the remnants of bread brought with us from Showey'rat, seasoning them with dry dates. An hour more we rode our way ; henceforth over dry ground, patched in one place with whitish sand, in another with parched-up grass and scrub, and everywhere strewn with stones. No village walls, no field, no palm-grove, no sign of habitation or tillage was anywhere within sight ; the desert-plain spread more and more barren ; its level horizon widening out as we advanced.

“ But when the sun was already more than half-way up the eastern sky, the attention of our whole party was arrested by a speck on the far-off horizon in front to our right. It moved ; it gradually increased ; it broke into

several dark points ; then united again, and seemed to increase every minute. ‘The Emeer’s caravan,’ whispered Moḥarib to me, as he came close to my side. My heart beat till I could scarcely draw my breath. ‘How do you know it?’ I said. ‘There was no other caravan about to come on that track,’ he answered ; ‘besides, I can recognise the litters.’

“I strained and strained my gaze, but could make out no particular objects in the moving outline. Only it was evident that if we remained where we were, the caravan would in less than an hour’s time pass within a quarter of a mile from the spot.

“‘They are fifty or sixty spears,’ whispered Moḍarrib, the keenest-sighted of our band, to Ja’ad. ‘We cannot attack them by daylight.’ Moḥarib looked at me ; ‘What do you say?’ he asked. ‘You are the best judges,’ I

answered; 'enough that they do not escape us.'

“ ‘This way, now,’ said Ja’ad, who had kept silence awhile, leading behind a rising ground to our left. There, sheltered from view, and without dismounting from our horses, we held a brief discussion; the chief point of which was, should we try our fortunes at once, or should we wait the night. Ḥarīth, Doheym, and myself were for the former alternative; but Moḥarib, whose prudence equalled his courage, and the eight others, decided for the latter. In fact, I myself soon perceived that in open fight, man to man, we must have the worse of it; they were five to one, and we could by daylight have no advantage, not even that of surprise, to counter-balance such odds. Yet had not this been a last chance I think that I should have insisted on making an attempt; but the know-

ledge that loss if incurred would be irreparable, and the thought of the risk which Zahra' must, in such an event undergo, held me back.

“ ‘ Their evening halt will be at the waters of Doneyyib,’ said Ja’ad. ‘ That will suit us admirably,’ answered Moḥarib ; ‘ I know the place ; and we can easily arrange our ambush. Let Ḥarith remain behind with the rest.’

“ It was agreed accordingly : Ja’ad, Moḥarib, Doheym, and myself, with Aman, who would not leave me, were to go forward, while Ḥarith and the six others stayed where they were, till the Emeer Daghfel and his men should be fairly out of sight, then follow the track as far as the Theneeyah,¹ half an hour’s distance from Doneyyib, and there wait in reserve.

¹ A defile, or narrow winding road between hills.

“This point settled, Ja’ad, myself, and our three companions resumed our route, but very cautiously, and on a line parallel with the caravan, which we desired to retain just in sight, and on no account to approach. By Moḥarib’s suggestion we reversed our lances, turning their points backwards and downwards, after the manner of the Shomer Arabs ; while Ja’ad, who had reassumed his post of guide, availed himself, with Bedouin tact, of every inequality of the ground, every wind-heaped sand-ridge, every bush of feathery ghaḍa, every circumstance of earth and air, to mask our number and our real direction. At times, when the Emeer’s party seemed likely to come too near, we halted altogether ; then went on again.

“I knew she was there, and knew also that the moment was not yet ; but I could not refrain from constant gazing towards the

slow-winding specks on the westerly horizon, as though I had been uncertain of her being among them, or my looking of any use then and there. Once, when the space between us was at the narrowest, I could just make out the crimson hangings of the camel-carried litters, in one of which she must be. O God, how I longed to break through all delay, put my horse to full speed, shout to my comrades 'follow,' and rush on the caravan, though guarded not by sixty but six hundred lances and swords. But I restrained myself, or rather Moḥarib's look and gesture restrained me. Would it had not ! Come what might have, it would have been better for me, for her. But now—"

Hermann broke off. "Keep up, my dear, dear fellow," said Ṭanṭawee ; "bear a brave heart. Regret and self-reproach in things like these is mere folly, and despair is cowardice.

All was for the best, I doubt not ; all may yet, will I hope, be well."

His friend smiled a sad smile, and shook his head. Then with a long-drawn sigh ; "God only knows," he said. "His we are, and to Him we all return. But this is idle ; I will complete my tale.

"We circled aside ; the caravan kept its way, and again became a mere speck on the desert rim. They had taken no notice of us. Silently, cautiously, we followed.

"The sunbeams were low and yellow, and our shadows stretched long and distorted over the ground, when we saw the object of our pursuit gradually leading off more on the right.

"They have made up their minds to halt for the night at the waters of Doneyyib ; it is what we wanted,' whispered Moḥarib to me. 'How is your heart, my brother ?'

“My answer was by look, not by words. Doheym drew closer, and he and Moḥarib held some talk with Ja’ad, but in so low a tone that the meaning escaped me.

“‘Now is the time,’ said Ja’ad, and added, turning to Aman, ‘Caution, my black brother, caution.’ Then turning his horse’s head to the right, he made us a sign to follow.

“‘Where are we going next? is it now?’ I thought, so far as the excitement I was in allowed me to think. But I asked no question. Briskly, yet more warily than ever, Ja’ad wound in and out amid sand-heaps and bushes, slopes and hollows, till I for one had wholly lost every idea of the way; though of this I took no note: my only care now was to reach the goal, and then—happen what might. So on we rode in silence, keeping close at our guide’s heels for an hour or more, till the long blurred shadows faded

away, and the steely grey of the sky overhead showed that the sun had set.

“Then Ja’ad slackened his horse’s pace to a slow walk; and we all went noiselessly following behind a long, steep bank, till we reached a spot where the meeting sand-drifts left between them only a kind of trench, about thirty feet in depth. So hidden, so seemingly low was the place, that one suddenly brought there might have fancied himself absolutely out of the world. Here Ja’ad halted, listened awhile, then dismounting threw his horse’s halter without a word to Doheym. We all alighted. Some whispering followed between Ja’ad and Moḥarib; after which the latter made me a sign to remain where I was. I obeyed. Ja’ad took in hand Moḥarib’s horse, and sat down close by, holding the halter, speechless and motionless. We all did the same.

“But Moḥarib, removing his head-dress, strewed his dark hair thickly over with earth-grey sand ; then took off his cloak also, and laid it on one side. Next, gently and circumspectly, he began climbing on all fours up the opposite bank, till he had reached its upper margin. There he stopped, and for a minute or two peered over the edge ; stooped again and redescended into the hollow not less cautiously than he had mounted. When at the bottom he shook the sand from his head, resumed his cloak and *ḵaffeeyah*, and came up to where I sat.

“‘The Benoo-Sheyban are encamped within bow-shot of the bank,’ he said. ‘We guessed that they would halt hereabouts, but did not expect to find them so near ; farther off would have been safer for us. However this is our opportunity ; and we must make the better use of it. Take off your *ḵaffeeyah*, and climb

up the slope where I did just now; only have a care when at the top to show as little of yourself as possible above it. You can then get a good look at the tents, right in front of you; and you will easily be able to distinguish the particular tent of the Sheykh's daughter; it is alongside of the tents of her maids and the other women, somewhat towards the left of the encampment. 'Fix it, and the way leading to it, well in your mind, that you may have no difficulty in finding it again in the dark. The Emeer Daghfel's tent is in the middle; and most of the men are close by it. But do not remain too long looking, or some one may see you and give the alarm.'

"Gently, gently, I crawled up the bank, using every precaution that I had observed Moḥarib do before me; but when I was just below the top, my heart palpitated with such violence

that its beatings might have been audible to any one near ; a mist came over my eyes ; my head swam round, and I almost loosened my hold on the thin grass tufts by me. If I had let them go, I should have rolled back into the hollow. However with a strong effort I steadied myself, and waited thus a few moments till my calmer sense returned ; then raised my head up to the margin and looked over.

“Immediately before me was a wide patch of reddish sand ; farther off on one side I noticed a sort of depression, with some bushes growing about it ; these indicated the waters of Doneyyib, the presence of which rendered this spot a favourite halt on the southward route. Behind the sand extended a tract of darker ground, scantily patched with dry herbage, and on it stood the Benoo-Sheyban tents, pitched in a double row. They were

eleven in all, six in front and five behind ; the latter were, from my point of view, partly covered, but not concealed, by those before them.

“ Third in the front row to the left stood the Emeer’s tent : it was readily distinguishable from the rest by its size, and by two long and tasselled spears stuck into the earth near the entrance. The remaining five tents on the same line also belonged to men : each was partly open, and had a spear planted at the door. Of the five ranged behind, two more were occupied by men, as was evident from the manner in which they had been pitched, and from the spears beside them.

“ Three tents stood on the right, side by side ; and these all were appropriated to women. I knew it by the care taken to fence them about, and to protect their indwellers from curious or even casual gaze.

In one of these three must be Zahra'. Again my head grew giddy, my eyesight dim. I thought, I hoped, I feared, I wished every instant that she herself might appear from out one of them. But though while I gazed and gazed, three or four veiled figures of women passed and repassed among the tents, now entering, now coming out, that one figure did not show itself. Had it been otherwise I believe that an involuntary cry, the utterance of irrepressible desire, would have betrayed me on the spot. It was ordained otherwise ; unheard, unseen, unsuspected, I held my watch.

“Now, however, my whole attention was directed to make sure which of the three tents was Zahra's. It was the centre one ; the glimpses of red and fringed curtains lining it, seen through and beneath the outer covering, and the frequent entrance and exit

of women as if on errands of service, and in particular of one dusky unveiled face, that of a slave girl, probably the Emeer's gift to his betrothed, indicated it to my eye. But even had there been no such token to distinguish it, I should certainly have recognised it all the same: my heart would have told me what my eyes did not."

"Indeed!" ironically interposed Tāṭawee.

"Love, and you will understand," rejoined Hermann; then continued—

"Sure now of my goal, I next carefully studied the path that was to conduct me thither. Accordingly I fixed in my mind the directions in which the tent-ropes were stretched, and how I might avoid stumbling over them; noted well the openings of the tents themselves; and determined by what way I could, with least likelihood of discovery, get round behind the encampment to that

tent which,—oh happiness!—I was to enter that night. No doubt to my anxious comrades below it must have seemed that I remained up there much longer than was either prudent or needful ; and in fact I believe that I protracted my gazing more than another would have done ; yet the whole survey took me then less time to make than it does now to recount.

“ At last I descended ; and Aman, who was to take part in the adventure some hours later, also scrambled up the bank, though at another point, and had a look at the camp in the gathering dusk. Meanwhile Ja’ad and Doheym waited below with the horses. When Aman had rejoined us, we moved off noiselessly all five for a good quarter of a mile down by the trench-like valley, till we had put a safe distance between the encampment and ourselves ; then we halted, picketed our horses, and sat down to hold a last council.

“Would it be possible in one way or other to apprise her we came to seek of our presence, before actually making the attempt that night? No; that could not be done. We must make our arrangements independently of her knowledge as yet. So it was settled that Ja’ad, who was the only one thoroughly acquainted with this neighbourhood, should without delay go and find out the remaining seven of our party, who would be by this time arrived at the Theneeyah, and bring them on here. We would then all wait together till the moon had set, and even later, to allow full time for every one belonging to the Sheybanee caravan to have gone to sleep. This would probably be before midnight.

“When all was still, we five, accompanied by the mulatto Harith, whose strength and courage rendered him a person of much importance on an occasion like this, would

return to the sand-hollow by the camp ; leaving the other six at the Theneeyah, to cover our escape and divert pursuers, if necessary. But of ourselves, two, namely Ja'ad and Doheym, should remain below in the hollow, holding the horses in readiness; while Moḥarib, Ḥarith, Aman, and myself climbed up to the level on which the tents were pitched. There three should conceal themselves in waiting ; while I, by what means I could, entered the tent of Zahra' herself, roused her, and brought her along with me.

“Should all this be done, as we hoped, unobserved, our task was easy. Zahra' would mount Sekab, a powerful grey mare, given for this very purpose by the old Emeer Faris to Ḥarith, as the best rider of the party, when we set out from Tell-'Afr, Ḥarith would mount before, and we would rejoin our comrades at the Theneeyah. Then all together

at full speed away ; and before sunrise we should have entered the limits of the Shomer clan, where we were sure of shelter and protection. But if on the other hand we happened to be discovered during our attempt on the camp, we must fight for it, and win our way through as best might be. If pursuit were given, some would skirmish, and facilitate the flight of the rest.

“ These things were settled on our way to and at the Theneeyah, before darkness had fully closed in. We then betook ourselves to our evening meal, of which we were much in need ; the greater number of us having hardly tasted anything the livelong-day. Yet we did not dare to light a fire and prepare the customary cakes of bread, lest the glare, reflected by the smoke, should betray us ; so we only mixed our coarse flour with the thick dingy water from the

leathern bags, and made it into a kind of porridge, which we accompanied with dry and dirty dates. Had our repast consisted of the choicest delicacies of a Bagdad kitchen, or had it been of sand and pebbles, I do not think that I should have observed the difference.

“The thin moon-crescent lowered and sank ; the stars came out, but not in the sharp clearness of the night before ; the smaller ones were hardly visible, and the larger had each around it a little ill-defined halo. ‘There will be a mist before morning,’ said Moḥarib, who was weather-wise after a sort.

“‘So much the better for us,’ answered Ja’ad. No one lay down to sleep ; we sat in groups, talking low and watching the stars.

“Never had their dial appeared to me so slow ; but it moved on, and at last announced that midnight was near. Ḥarith pointed to

the flying eagle,¹ which had now declined half-way to the horizon, and unfastened Sekab; we, that is, the other five of his party, got our horses ready, and with an 'In the name of God,' set out, Ja'ad leading as before. We reached the hollow. Not a sound was heard. Had the encampment been twenty miles away, the quiet could not have been more complete. Softly we dismounted, Moḥarib, Ḥarith, Aman, and I; gave our horses and our spears in charge of Doheym and Ja'ad; took off our cloaks and laid them on the sand; and in our under garments, with no arms but sword and knife, prepared ourselves for the decisive attempt.

"I did not think, I had no leisure to think, as we clambered up the loose bank, half earth half sand; the position required the fullest

¹ "Atair" in European star-charts.

attention every moment ; an incautious movement, a slip, a sound, and the whole encampment would be on foot, to the forfeit, not of my life, not of all our lives only,—that I should have reckoned a light thing,—but of my love also. One by one we reached the summit : before us stood the tents, just visible in dark outline : all around was open shadow, no moving figure broke its stillness, no voice or cry anywhere ; nor did any light appear at first in the tents. The entire absence of precaution showed how unexpected was our visit ; so far was well ; my courage rose, my hope also.

“ Following the plan we had agreed on, we laid ourselves flat on the sand, and so dragged ourselves forward on and on, hardly lifting our heads a little to look round from time to time, till we found ourselves near the front tent furthest on the left. No one had stirred

without, and the tent itself was silent as a grave. Round it, and round the tent that stood next behind it we crawled slowly on, stopping now and then, and carefully avoiding the getting entangled among the pegs and outstretched ropes. Above all, we gave the widest berth possible to what appeared in the darkness like four or five blackish mounds on the sand, and which were in fact guards, wrapped up in their cloaks and, fortunately for us, fast asleep.

“When we had arrived at the outside corner of the encampment, Ḥarith stopped, and remained couched on the ground where the shade was deepest; it was his place of watch. Twenty or twenty-five paces further on Aman at my order did the same. Moḥarib accompanied me till, having fairly turned the camp, we came close behind Zahra’s tent, in which I now observed for the first time that a light

was burning. Here Moḥarib also stretched himself flat on his face, to await me when I should issue forth from among the curtains.

“ And now, as if on purpose to second our undertaking, arrived unsought-for the most efficacious help that we could have desired to our concealment. While crossing the sandy patch, I had felt on my face a light puff of air, unusually damp and chill. Looking up, I perceived a vapoury wreath, as of thin smoke, blown along the ground. It was the mist; and, accustomed to the desert and its phenomena, I knew that in less than half an hour more the dense autumn fog would have set in, veiling earth and everything on it till sunrise. This time, however, the change in the atmosphere was quicker than usual; so that before I had well got behind the tent-range, the thickness of the air would hardly have allowed any object to be seen at a few yards’ distance,

even had it been daylight. As it was, the darkness was complete.

“Creeping forward, I gradually loosened one of the side pegs that made the tent-wall between the ropes fast to the ground. Through the opened chink a yellow ray shot forth into the fog; the whole tent seemed to be lighted up within. Hastily I reclosed the space, while a sudden thrill of dread ran through me; some maid, some slave might be watching. Or what if I had been mistaken in the tent itself? What if not she but others were there? Still there was no help for it now; the time of deliberation had gone by; proceed I must and I would, whatever the consequences.

“Once more I raised the goat’s-hair hangings, and peeped in. I could see the light itself, a lamp placed on the floor in front, and burning; but nothing moved; no sound

was heard. I crawled further on my hands and knees, till the whole interior of the tent came into view. It was partly covered with red strips of curtain, and the ground itself was covered with carpets. Near the light a low couch, formed by two mattresses one upon the other, had been spread; some one lay on it;—O God! *she* lay there!

“The stillness of the night, the hour, the tent, of her sleep, her presence, her very unconsciousness, awed, overpowered me. For a moment I forgot my own purpose, everything. To venture in seemed profanation; to arouse her, brutal, impious. Yet how had I come, and for what? Then in sudden view all that had been since that last night of meeting at Diar-Bekr, stood distinct before me; more yet, I saw my comrades on their watch outside, the horses in the hollow; I saw the morrow’s sun shine bright on our

haven of refuge, on our security of happiness. Self-possessed and resolute again, I armed myself with the conscience of pure love, with the memory and assurance of hers, and entered.

“ Letting the hangings drop behind me, I rose to my feet ; my sword was unsheathed, my knife and dagger were ready in my belt ; my pistols, more likely to prove dangerous than useful at this stage of the enterprise, I had left below with my horse. Then bare-foot and on tiptoe, I gently approached the mattress-couch. It was covered all over with a thin sheet of silken gauze ; upon this a second somewhat thicker covering, also of silk, had been cast ; and there, her head on a silken rose-coloured pillow, she lay, quiet as a child.

“ I can see her now,”—thus continued Hermann, gazing fixedly on the air before him,

and speaking, not as though to his friend, but to some one far off. "I can see her even now. She was robed from head to foot in a light white dress, part silk, part cotton, and ungirdled ; she rested half turning to her right side ; her long black hair, loosened from its bands, spread in heavy masses of glossy waviness, some on her pillow, some on her naked arm and shoulder, ebony on ivory ; one arm was folded under her head, the other hung loosely over the edge of the mattress, till the finger-tips almost touched the carpet. Her face was pale, paler, I thought, than before ; but her breathing came low, calm, and even, and she smiled in her sleep.

"Standing thus by her side, I remained awhile without movement, and almost without breath. I could have been happy so to remain for ever. To be with her, even though she neither stirred nor spoke, was Paradise ; I

needed neither sign nor speech to tell me her thoughts ; I knew them to be all of love for me,—love not rash nor hasty, but pure, deep, unaltered, unalterable as the stars in heaven. It was enough ; could this last, I had no more to seek. But a slight noise outside the tent, as if of some one walking about the camp, roused me to the sense of where I was, and what was next to be done. I must awaken her ; yet how could I do so without startling or alarming her ?

“ Kneeling softly by the couch, I took in mine the hand that even in sleep seemed as if offered to me, gently raised it to my lips, and kissed it. She slumbered quietly on. I pressed her fingers, and kissed them again and yet again with increasing warmth and earnestness. Then, at last becoming conscious, she made a slight movement, opened her eyes, and awoke.

“ ‘What ! you Aḥmed !’ she said, half rising from the bed ; ‘I was just now dreaming about you. Is it really you ? and how came you here ? who is with you ? are you alone ?’ These words she accompanied with a look of love full as intense as my own ; but not unmixed with anxiety, as she glanced quickly round the tent.

“ ‘Dearest Zahra’ ! sister ! my heart ! my life !’ I whispered, and at once caught her in my arms. For a moment she rested in my embrace ; then recollecting herself, the place, the time, drew herself free again.

“ ‘Did you not expect me, Zahra’ ?’ I added ; ‘had you no fore-knowledge, no anticipation, of this meeting ? or could you think that I should so easily resign you to another ?’

“ The tears stood in her eyes. ‘Not so,’ she answered ; ‘but I thought, I had intended that the risk should be all my own. I knew

you were on our track, but did not imagine you so near : none else in the caravan guessed anything. You have anticipated me by a night, one night only ; and, — O God ! — at what peril to yourself ! Are you aware that sixty chosen swordsmen of Benoo-Sheyban are at this moment around the tent ? Oh, Ahmed ! oh, my brother ! what have you ventured ? Where are you come ? ’

“ In a few words, as few as possible, I strove to allay her fears. I explained all to her ; told her of the measures we had taken, the preparations we had made, the horse waiting, the arms ready to escort and defend her ; and implored her to avail herself of them without delay.

“ Calmly she listened ; then, blushing deep ; ‘ It is well, my brother,’ she said ; ‘ I am ready.’ Thus saying, she caught up her girdle from the couch ; and began to gather her loosened

garments about her, and to fasten them for the journey. No sign of hesitation now appeared, hardly even of haste. Her eye was bright, but steady; her colour heightened; her hand free from tremor.

“ But even as she stooped to gather up her veil from the pillow on which she had laid it, and prepared to cast it over her head, she suddenly started, hearkened, raised herself upright, stood still an instant, and then, putting her hand on my arm, whispered: ‘We are betrayed; listen.’

“ Before she had finished speaking I heard a rustle outside, a sound of steps, as of three or four persons, barefoot and cautious in their advance, coming towards the front of the tent. I looked at Zahra; she had now turned deadly pale, her eyes were fixed on the curtained entrance; yet in her look I read no fear, only settled, almost desperate,

resolution. My face was, I do not doubt, paler even than hers; my blood chilled in my veins. Instinctively we each made to the other a sign for silence, a sign, indeed superfluous in such circumstances, and remained attentive to the noise without. The steps drew nearer; we could even distinguish the murmur of voices, apparently as of several people talking together in an under-tone, though not the words themselves. When just before the entrance of the tent, the foot-fall ceased; silence followed. The curtains which formed the door were drawn together, one a little overlapping the other, so as to preclude all view from the outside; but they were in no way fastened within; and to have attempted thus to close them at that moment would have been worse than useless.

“Zahra’ and I threw our arms, she round me, I round her; and our lips met in the

mute assurance, that whatever was to be the fate of one, should also be the fate of the other. But she blushed more deeply than ever, crimson-red : I could see that by the light of the lamp which we longed to, but at that moment dared not, extinguish. Its ray fell on the door-hangings, outside which stood those whom their entire silence, more eloquent than words, proclaimed to be listeners and spies. Who they were, and what precisely had brought them there, and with what intent they waited, we could not tell.

“ Half a minute,—it could not have been more,—passed thus in breathless stillness ; it was a long half-minute to Zahra’ and me. At last we heard a sort of movement taking place in the group without ; it seemed as though they first made a step or two forwards ; then returned again, talking all the while

among themselves in the same undertone; then slowly moved away towards the line of tents in front. No further sound was heard: all was hushed. Zahra' and I loosed our hold, and stood looking at each other. How much had been guessed, how much actually detected, I could not tell; she however knew.

“‘Fly, Ahmed,’ she whispered; ‘fly! That was the Emeer himself. They are on the alert; you are almost discovered; in a few minutes more the alarm will be given throughout the camp. For your life, fly!’

“I stood there like one entranced; the horror of that moment had numbed me, brain and limb. And how could I go? Her voice, her face, her presence, were, God knows, all on earth to me. How then could I leave them to save a life valueless to me without them?’

“‘In God’s name,’ she urged, ‘haste. Your only hope, brother, lies in getting away from here quickly and unperceived ; in the darkness you can yet manage it ; tell me, how is it outside ?’

“‘Thick mist ;’ I answered : ‘it was coming on before I reached the tent.’

“‘Thank God,’ she said, with a half-sob of relief, and a tone the like of which I never heard before or after, ‘that it is has saved you ; that has prevented your companions from being discovered. Dearest Aḥmed,’ she continued, kissing me in her earnestness, ‘as you love me, for my sake, for your own sake, for both of us, fly,—it is the only chance left.’

“‘Fly, Zahra’! Zahra’, my life!’ I answered, almost with a laugh ; ‘fly ! and leave you here behind ; never.’

“‘As you have any love for me, Aḥmed,’

she replied in a low, hurried, choking voice ; ‘as you would not expose me to certain dishonour and death ; as you hope ever to meet me again ;—O Aḥmed ! my brother ! my only love !—it is their reluctance alone to shame me by their haste while yet a doubt remains, that has screened you thus far ;—but they will return. Alone, I shall be able to extricate myself ; I shall have time and means ;—but you ;—oh, save yourself, my love ; save me !’

“ ‘Dearest Zahra,’ ” replied I, pressing her to my breast ; ‘and you ? what will you do ?’

“ ‘Fear not for me,’ she answered, her eye sparkling as she spoke. ‘I am Sheykh Asa’ad’s daughter ; and all the Emeers in Arabia, with all Sheyban to aid, cannot detain me a prisoner, or put force on my will. God lives, and we shall meet again ;

till then take and keep this token.' She drew a ring from her finger and gave it to me. 'By this ring, and God to witness, I am yours, Aḥmed, yours only, yours for ever. Now ask no more : fly.'

" 'One kiss, Zahra.' One, many; she was in tears; then, forcing a smile to give me courage; 'Under the protection of the best Protector,' she said, 'to Him I commit you in pledge; Aḥmed, brother, love, go in safety.'

"What could I do but obey? As I slipped out between the curtains, I gave one backward look; I saw her face turned towards me, her eye fixed on me with an expression that not even in death can I forget; it was love stronger than any death. An instant more, and I was without the tent. That moment the light within it disappeared."

Hermann dropped his voice, and put his hand up to his face. As he did so, the moon-

light glittered on an emerald, set in a gold ring, on the little finger. Ṭaṇṭawee looked at it.

“That is the ring, I suppose, Aḥmed Beg,” he said. “I have often noticed it before ; and she, I hope, will see it yet again one day, and know it for your sake ; so take heart, brother, perhaps the day is nearer than you think.’”

“She will recognise it on me,” answered Hermann, in a low sad voice, “either alive or dead ; it will remain with me to the last, though if there be hope in it, I know not.” Then he added, “She has no like token from me ; I did not then think of offering any ; nor did she ask : there was no need.”

Both were silent. After a few minutes, during which the plashing of the quick waves against the bows of the ship was the only sound heard, Hermann resumed.

“Issuing from the tent, I came at once into the dense mist ; through its pitchy darkness

no shape could be discerned at ten yards of distance. Instinctively, for I was scarcely aware of my own movements, I crept to where Moḥarib lay crouched on the ground, and touched him ; he looked up, half-rose and followed. Passing Aman and Ḥarith, we roused them too in their turn ; there was no time for question or explanation then, all knew that something had gone wrong, but no one said a word. Nor was there yet any sign around us that our attempt had been perceived ; no one seemed to be on the alert or moving. I began almost to hope that the sounds heard while in the tent might have been imaginary, or, at least, that suspicion, if awakened, had by this time been quieted again.

“ But only a few paces before we reached the brink of the hollow, something dark started up between it and us, and I felt myself touched by a hand. I leapt to my feet ; and while I did

so a blow was aimed at me, I think with a knife. It missed its intent, but ripped my sleeve open from shoulder to elbow, and slightly scratched my arm. At the same moment Harith's sword came down on the head of the figure now close beside me; it uttered a cry and fell.

“ Instantly that cry was repeated and echoed on every side, as if the whole night had burst out at once into voice and fury. We ran towards the hollow. When on its verge, I turned to look back a moment; and even through the thick mist could see the hurry and confusion of dark shapes; while the shout, ‘Sheyban!’ ‘Help, Sheyban!’ ‘Help, Rabee’ah!’ rose behind, around, coming nearer and nearer, mixed with the tramp of feet. ‘Quick! quick!’ exclaimed Harith; we rolled down rather than descended into the hollow; there stood Ja’ad and Doheym, ready by the horses, who, conscious of danger, neighed and stamped

violently : but before we could mount and ride, the enemy was upon us.

“ How many they were I could not distinguish ; the only thing certain was, that we were surprised and outnumbered. As our assailants poured down upon us from the steep sides of the gully, they raised a shout, a yell rather, enough to unnerve any but desperate men ; that however were we, and thanked them for the outcry that revealed to us the direction of their attack, which would otherwise have been in great measure concealed from us by the fog and the darkness. We for our part returned no answer, uttered no cry ; but while we struggled to get on our horses, struck out, each at what was nearest to him ; we had perceived that those we had at the moment to deal with were on foot, and that, consequently, we, if once in the saddle, were sure of escape, at any rate, for the present.

“I struck down a Sheybanee who came between me and my horse; put my hand on the saddle-bags, felt that the pistols were in them, and was on the point of vaulting on the animal's back, when another fellow grappled me hand to hand. Warding his blows the best I could, I tried to draw out one of my pistols, when I received from somewhere a cut over the head, that glanced without going deep, but made a wide gash in the skin, and covered my face with blood. I staggered, then collected my strength, dashed my opponent to the ground, grasped the mane of my horse, sprang on him and galloped off, bleeding, but not seriously hurt. Ja'ad had already cleared his way. Moḥarib and Aman, the former considerably cut about the arms and shoulders, extricated themselves at the same time that I did. Ḥarith, who, like Aman and myself, was only scratched, followed close;

Doheym alone, poor lad, remained behind; he had received his death-blow, and those bright eyes of his were dimmed for ever.

“We, however, had no time for mourning or revenge; all down the dark valley the clamour of the night seemed to increase and gather rather than diminish; and we were sure that in short space the Sheybanee horse would be full on our pursuit. Away we went till we entered the Theneeyah, and in its narrow defile found our six comrades, awaiting us ready-mounted, and their spears in their hands. They had been already apprised by the clamour of what had happened, and were overjoyed to see now that one only of our band was missing. We were now eleven men in all; but the number of the enemy was, out of question, much greater; so that no alternative remained except flight, while flight was yet available. Sooner or later an unequal fight

would probably have to be tried ; but we reserved its chances for our last resort.

“Two hours of darkness were left, and we made the best of them, urging our beasts to their fullest speed ; but unable to get out of reach of the ominous sound of horses’ hoofs, halloas, and ‘Ah ! Sheyban !’ ‘Ah ! Rabee’ah !’ in our rear. Dawn stole on, turning the dense gloom around to confused milky light, all too soon ; for we perceived that our jaded horses, scantily fed and over-worked of late, were gradually slackening their pace ; while our freshly-mounted pursuers kept gaining on us more and more, though the mist curtain, now an impenetrable veil of reflected shine, concealed them from sight.

“This advantage was now, however, to be withdrawn, leaving us to our own unequal resources. The sun had risen unperceived ; but soon the heat of his beams penetrated

that dense vapour ; it thinned, broke into rolling drifts here and there, then scattered in light curls, and vanished as suddenly as it had at first come on. Open around us lay the brown shelterless desert, streaked with long lines of yellow, and meagerly spotted over with dry, stunted, shrub ; to right and left neither tree nor hill broke the hopeless monotony of the horizon. Only far, far away in front stretched a low black line ; I recognised in it the appearance, well known to me now, of planted palm-trees.

“ Those are the palm-groves of Sook;¹ if we can once reach them, we are safe,’ said Moḥarib, who was riding at my side.

“ How far off are they ?’ I asked.

¹ Also called “Sook-esh-Sheyookh,” a large Arab village on the right bank of the Euphrates, not many miles above the junction of that river with the Tigris at Korneh.

“‘Four hours yet,’ was the answer.

“‘Shall we be able to get there?’

“‘God knows.’

“Behind us, and now close upon us, came the Sheybanees, twenty in number, with shout, taunt, and yell, brandishing their spears in the certainty of soon overtaking us. Their horses were fresh, and the riders evidently confident of an easy victory; their swords hung by their sides; most had daggers too, but no fire-arms. All wore the ordinary long Bedouin shirt; and a few had on, in addition, coats of mail and light iron helmets. Each man had drawn the end of his head-dress tight across the lower part of his face so as to be scarcely recognisable, and peered at us with narrow wolfish eyes, eager for blood.

“Conspicuous among the rest was a stout, black-browed, black-eyed, clear-complexioned youth, wearing beneath his armour a red silk

dress, and on his head a gay silk handkerchief, crimson and yellow, fastened about by a thick many-folded band of brown camel's hair; the lance he held was tassel-hung; the scabbard and sword-hilt at his side were gilt; he was mounted on a light bay horse; what could be seen of his features bore to my eye a strange but distinct resemblance to her from whom I had so lately parted.

“It is the Emeer Daghfel himself. He is riding his horse, El-Ashkar;¹ what can he have done with his mare Dahma²?”

“She is the better of the two,” observed Shebeeb.

“I looked at my rival, with what thoughts you can imagine. He, however, had not recognised me as yet, but I felt certain that he

¹ “The Bay.”

² “The Black.”

must soon do so, and then one or other of us would remain on the field ; perhaps both. I resolved to be beforehand with him.

“ But the sudden check which I gave to my horse’s bridle betrayed my intention to Moḥarib.

“ ‘ Are you mad, Aḥmed Agha ? ’ he exclaimed. ‘ If you attack him so, you are lost ; he is a practised spearsman, and you are none ; besides he is mounted on El-Ashḵar, fresh and vigorous, while the horse you are on is half lame. Go on straight before you ; I know all the tricks of skirmishing, and I will check the pursuit while you get off.’

“ Ḥarith, overheard us.

“ ‘ Not you, Moḥarib,’ he said. ‘ I am the older and the more skilled. I will try my lance first.’

“ With this he turned, and shouting, ‘ Hurrah for Riaḥ ! Hurrah for ’Adwan ! I am Aboo-

Nefeesah,¹ and he who does not know me, let him learn me now !' rode towards the Sheybanees, quivering his spear as he advanced. Three horsemen darted forward from the enemy's ranks to accept the challenge. Meanwhile the flight and pursuit slackened, then stopped altogether ; either party reined in ; it was impossible to refrain from looking on.

" Wheeling hither and thither, now seated upright on his horse, now bending down all along on its back, or over the side, Harith kept his adversaries, three though they were, at bay, making and eluding more spear-thrusts than I could count. It seemed more like a playful trial of horsemanship than a real and deadly conflict ; till, after many minutes had thus passed, the Riahee, suddenly crossing the

¹ Bedouins often take their patronymic from a daughter, as town Arabs from a son.

line of one assailant, drove his lance right through him from side to side ; then drew it out, looked closely at the dripping point, and exclaimed, ' Done for ! ' while the wounded man reeled, fell to the ground, and, with a few short struggles, lay still and lifeless.

" With a louder ' Hurrah for ' Adwan ! ' Ḥarith returned to the charge. But while with outstretched lance he pursued the simulated flight of one of the remaining Sheybanees, the other, coming up at full speed from behind, aimed a sword-blow at his head. Ḥarith was aware of it, and swerved aside, but not enough to escape the keen edge of the weapon, which caught his leg just above the knee, and almost severed it. Yet before he dropped from his horse, the mulatto, exclaiming, ' Blow for blow ! I am Aboo-Nefeesah ! ' had cleft his enemy's skull, through iron cap and bone down to the eye-brows. Both rolled on the sand together,

one dead, the other dying, till the third Sheybanee riding up, put an end, with a spear-thrust, to Harith's courage and life.

“Neither side could now be held in any longer. ‘Come on, dogs of Riah!’ shouted the Sheybanees. ‘Polite language, men of Rabee’ah!’ was our answer; and we dashed against each other like counter-currents of the sea. We were now ten, they eighteen; and though they were better mounted and in part better armed than we, the combat did not seem so wholly unequal; nor was it the first time that Benoo-Riah had to fight against odds. Besides, the palm-groves of Sook, our nearest refuge, were still a mere dark streak on the horizon, and we could never hope to reach them without a trial of strength to the utmost; better then have it out at once; it was our fairest chance. As for me, I was wholly wild, reckless of others,

reckless for myself. The remembrance of Zahra' herself did not soothe or soften me now. Behind me was bitter disappointment; around me blood and death; before me all was blank, tinged with one hue only—the ferocity of mere despair.

“With taunt, threat, cheer, cry, we rushed on, each man singling out his antagonist. Then we turned, doubled, charged, retreated, charged again, till the dust rose on all sides like battle-smoke, and the plain resembled some thronged meydan¹ on a festival, full of jereed players; only that here, instead of palm-sticks, were sharp spears and keen-edged

¹ The open space within or in the immediate vicinity of every Turkish or Arab town; it serves as a promenade on festival days, a place for horse-exercise, especially in the well-known game of “jereed,” or “palm-stick,” a kind of Eastern tournament, and so forth.

swords, bright at first, soon dulled with blood; the sands too reddened beneath.

“Howeyrith, Ja’ad, Moḍarrib, and the rest fought well; the Benoo-Sheyban too made good their title to their old name of ‘Arāḳim.’¹ The leaders on our side, now that Ḥarith had fallen, were Moḥarib and Ja’ad; the Emeer Daghfel, with a brother and an uncle of his, headed the hostile clan. For myself, giving myself wholly up to the one only distinct feeling that now remained to me—deadly hate, I made straight through the confusion for Daghfel. My fashion of riding, the pistols at my belt, my face, browned indeed, with exposure, but unlike in feature to the customary face of the desert, soon announced me for whom I was to the keen eyes of the enemy.

¹ “The banded vipers,” a surname given this tribe in pre-Islamitic times.

“ ‘The Bagdadee! the Bagdadee!’ was exclaimed on all sides. At that name I could see the scowl that darkened Daghfel’s face; the expression of my own was probably not more amiable. The Emeer shook his lance and pointed it towards me. I, however, had no intention of waiting his onslaught. He had, I was well aware, the superiority over me in the arms of his kind, but I was possessed of weapons to which he was unaccustomed, and for which he might be unprepared. So drawing a pistol, I fired it at my rival; but whether the resemblance he bore in my eyes to Zahra’ unnerved me, or whether it was the starting of my horse, I missed my aim; and the ball went wide of its mark. It was not wholly wasted though, for it penetrated the thigh of a ferocious-looking Sheybanee close by, breaking the bone, and throwing the man disabled from his saddle.

“ The blue smoke curled in the faces of the Benoo-Sheyban, and a momentary confusion followed this introduction of new weapons into the fray ; even the Emeer himself seemed for an instant to lose his presence of mind. Following up my advantage, I drew the second pistol from my belt and snapped it ; no report came ; the priming had dropped out. Before I had time to remedy the defect, Daghfel was upon me. In a rage I threw away my now useless fire-arm ; and, lance to lance, engaged in thrust and parry with my enemy. I strove hard to reach him near enough for a sword-blow, but could not.

“ Armed in mail, he had more than once received with impunity the baffled point of my spear ; and now, taking the offensive in his turn, was about to return my thrusts, with better and probably fatal aim, when a third person intervened between us ; it was

Moḥarib ; his brandished lance quivered in the air ; his eyes shot fire.

“‘ I am Akhoo-Leyla ¹!’ I am the champion of ‘Adwan ! I am the revenger of Ḥarith !’ he cried, as he rode at the Emeer of Sheyban, compelling him by the fury of his attack to let me alone, and to give his whole attention to this new enemy. Involuntarily, as it were, all the others drew back ; the general conflict was stayed ; the riders sat still on their saddles, I perforce, like the rest ; a spell seemed to be cast over the field. Every eye was directed on the two combatants, unequal in age, but well matched for skill and courage : Daghfel was the stronger, but Moḥarib the more active. No one was, by tacit consent on either side, permitted to interfere ; the wounded lay untended on the

¹ “ The brother of Leyla.”

ground ; their horses ran wild over the plain.

“ For more than half-an-hour the duellists exhausted every effort, every artifice of spearsmanship and horsemanship, each to gain of the other but one moment’s advantage, one single unguarded spot in steed or rider ; and still every thrust was turned aside or evaded, every feat of dexterity foiled by its counterpart. They came and went, retreated and pursued, attacked and eluded, till the eye grew giddy watching them, and the air was dim with dust. Meanwhile, in hideous mockery of the combat on earth, two large eagles of the desert, dark, gaunt, wide-winged birds, kept crossing and re-crossing overhead, wheeling round each other in intricate circles of flight, as though reproducing in mid-sky the skirmish beneath.

“ More than half-an-hour ; and then the scale, long evenly-balanced, turned. A sudden

swirl of the hot wind of noon, tearing onwards with a violence not less extreme than transient, and driving sand and light gravel before it, swept the desert, and blew right into Daghfel's face and eyes, blinding him for the moment to everything around. It was Moḥarib's opportunity, and he seized it. Marking well his aim, he charged on his adversary ; and before the Emeer had recovered his lost guard, the spear of the Riaḥee had entered his right side below the ribs, passed through and through flesh and mail ; and came out several inches beyond on the left. Moḥarib tried to withdraw the weapon, but could not. Transfixed as he was, Daghfel rolled in blood at his horse's feet.

“ A savage yell,—of rage from these, of triumph from those,—rent the air. Then followed a fearful battle ; the Benoo-Sheyban dashed in, furious to avenge their chief ; we met

them half-way ; it was hand-to-hand on both sides. The spear now availed little ; swords and knives did the work henceforward. But fiercest of all, the struggle raged round Moḥarib, who, assailed by five swordsmen at once, defended himself like a tiger at bay, but was unable to free his path through. Sa'ad, Do'eyj, and I hastened to the rescue. Do'eyj fell, and was trampled under hoof ; but Sa'ad, and myself made our way good into the very thickest of the fight. I cut down a tall Sheybanees whose sword was even then raised to strike ; Sa'ad severed the hand of another, a grizzly-haired man,—it was 'Obeyd, Daghfel's own uncle,—from the wrist ; but all too late to save my ill-fated friend, who, covered with wounds, lay already on the ground, gashed and bleeding from head to foot. As I reached the spot he opened his eyes and looked up at me ; death was written in red lines on

every limb and on each feature of his pale face. Collecting his breath with difficulty, he said: 'Brother! Aḥmed! I commit you to God; live happy.' My own voice choked in tears; I had no answer. Then murmuring as to himself, 'I am Akhoo-Leyla, I am the cousin of Ḥafṣah; there is no God but God,' he repeated; a slight struggle followed,—he was dead.

"All these things passed in less time than I take in relating them. But while, forgetful of every one around, I leaned from my horse over the lifeless body of my brother, so true a brother to me, I saw as in a dream a horseman of Sheyban ride up and aim at me with his sword a blow which, so heart-broken and spiritless was I now, I cared neither to parry nor return. That horseman was the Emeer Thabit, Daghfel's younger brother; and the blow, weighted with all the load of family

vengeance, would have been my certain death, had not Aman, who the whole of that day had kept by me as near as he could, thrust himself in before the descending weapon, and received the cut intended for me. The sword-edge, intercepted by the negro's dagger glanced downwards, and entering the flesh aslant, made a wide though not fatal gash : you have seen the scar. Aman staggered, but kept his seat, and recovering himself dealt the young Emeer a stroke over the shoulder that cleft the bone, and almost separated the entire arm from the body : Thabit fell, and never rose afterwards. Ja'ad, Musa'ab, and Sheebbeb came to our help ; the Sheybanees renewed the fight ; Sheebbeb was killed, and Musa'ab disabled ; but Ja'ad, whose cool caution never failed him in the hottest of the tumult, gave many more and worse wounds than he took, till, aided by Aman, who

hewed about him like a demon, he cleared an opening, through which he led my horse. I myself, who had received many gashes in the fray, besides the first head-wound in the hollow of Doneyyib, and was dizzy with loss of blood, and exhausted body and mind, could alone have offered no further defence, much less attack.

“By this, our desperation had proved itself more deadly than our assailants’ fury. Five on our side had fallen; two more, of whom I was one, were almost helpless; but the remaining five, in spite of wounds and weariness, still sat firm on their saddles, sword in hand, and ready for the fight. Of the Benoo-Sheyban, nine lay dead or dying on the sand; and four others had been so severely wounded that they were barely able, if at all, to lift a sword. Besides, the young Emeer Thabit had perished, the Sheykh ’Obeyd was as

good as dead, and the Emeer Daghfel, though not killed outright, lay senseless and bleeding fast; if he were left much longer so, his prospects of life were small. The ardour of our pursuers had cooled; the energy of their vengeance slackened. We too had no desire to prolong the combat; our enemy was still seven to five; and escape, not slaughter, was our chief aim.

“So on either side the survivors drew back. A pause followed. Then an elderly man, with face uncovered, and a thin grey beard, came forward from amidst the Sheybanee group. He held his lance somewhat reversed, and his sword, though unsheathed, was lowered.

“‘Brothers of Riah,’ he said; ‘God has decided the matter between us. Our leaders both of them have fallen; many brave men have perished also; much blood has been

shed, and widows and orphans enough made for this one day. Let it suffice us. Go your way as God may guide you ; we will go ours. Our two clans shall settle the price of blood afterwards.'

"While he was thus speaking, Aman, mad to revenge his friend Sheebbeb, came close up to me, and whispered in my ear ; 'He lies, the grey-bearded villain ; by God, he lies. Moharib is dead, my brother Sheebbeb is dead, and the Emeer Daghfel yet lives ; I saw him move just now. I will go and finish him. I shall have done it before any of them can stop me ; and after that if they wish for peace we will give it.'

"But I held him back. 'No,' I said ; 'you shall not do it ; he has got his share ; leave him.' I myself thought that Daghfel would for a certainty die of his wound ; and the idea of killing in cold blood an enemy, even

were he my rival, revolted my mind. Besides, was he not cousin to Zahra' ? and had not two other near relatives of hers fallen that day, if not by my hand, at least through my cause ? Even should the Emeer survive, he would never see Zahra' again ; of that my heart assured me. Whether he died or lived, I could wish him now no fresh harm ; my account with him was cancelled, and I would not add to the past score.

“Meantime Ja'ad had ridden to the front. ‘Be it so,’ he said, addressing the Sheybanee envoy ; ‘only let the dead, ours and yours, remain unspoiled ; each tribe shall bury its own. As to the price of blood, the Emeer 'Ajlan of Shomer, on whose pasture-grounds we now are, shall decide between us. Are you content with this ?’

“After a little further parley, more for form's sake than otherwise, the Benoo-Sheyban con-

sented. Two of our side and two of theirs alighted, and began scooping out with their spears the sand and earth for the shallow graves; those of Riaḥ to the east, those of Sheyban to the west. Each corpse was laid apart in its narrow resting-place, with the face turned towards the kibleh;¹ in haste then earth was thrown over them, and a large stone placed at the head and the foot of every mound.

“Moḥarib’s grave was dug somewhat apart from the rest; for, though young, he had while living been looked upon as the leader of our troop; and but that twice as many had fallen on the Benoo-Sheyban side as on ours, the Benoo-Riaḥ would not have desisted from the fight, while the Emeer Daghfel retained ever

¹ Mahometans always lay a dead body on its side, looking in the direction of the centre of prayer at Mekka.

so slender a chance of life. When they had thrown the last handful of sand on the tomb that covered so much daring, constancy, and love, they took Moḥarib's lance and broke it there ; lastly they brought his horse, Ajrad, an iron-grey, and killed it over its master's burial place. The Benoo-Sheyban did the same at the grave of their Emeer Thabit. Then the Fatihah was recited by the few who knew it among those present ; and all was over.

“While the work went on, those who did not take an active share in the burying, remained seated on their horses, their spears ready and their swords in their hands, to guard against treachery. I cried bitter tears, and would have dismounted to embrace my dead friend once more before he was hid for ever from me under the sand, but Ja'ad and Howeyrith restrained me.

“ ‘It would profit you nothing,’ they said,

‘and we fear for you, if you alight, the faithlessness of the “Araḳim” of Benoo-Sheyban. You are he whom they would most gladly kill. We must now make what haste we can to get to a safe place of shelter, where our wounds may be bandaged, and where we may find drink and food. If we linger on the way we shall all die of thirst.’

“Sa’ad and Moḍarrib, their sad task ended, remounted, and we rode off together, now seven only, weary and disheartened. Yet neither then nor afterwards did I hear a word, a hint, of reproach. No one said, ‘You have brought us to this; it was your doing—on your account.’ I was a brother of the tribe; and with me as such they took their chances, good or ill, loss or gain alike; and if they grieved it was as much for my failure as for their own, or rather they made no distinction between the two. Not even for the dead did they hold

me in any way responsible. The five who had fallen had but met their appointed fate, an honourable fate; it was matter of regret, but not of repining, still less of blame. To me the manner of my adopted tribesmen was unchanged, and the hearts and arms of Benoo-Riaḥ were at my disposal after the 'day of Marran,'¹—so that fatal plain was called,—as entirely as before.

“Looking back from our eastward path, I saw the Benoo-Sheyban slowly moving away in the opposite direction; they had laid Daghfel on his horse, and were supporting him on its back, one to either side. The Emeer's arms hung dangling down; he gave no sign of life. Nearer I could discern the

¹ Bedouins, in mentioning a fray, always call it “the day of such or such a place,” naming that where it was fought.

grave-stones, black specks on the sand. Large irregular patches of brown gave witness to the blood that had been shed there. Then everything grew indistinct before my eyes; loss of blood had nearly deprived me of sight; and an all-engrossing thirst took possession of me, till neither feeling, care, nor thought was left but one longing, tormenting, insatiable cry of 'Water! Water!' Yet in this agony I made no effort to hasten my horse's pace, or to urge on my companions; it seemed to me that we all of us were moving along spell-bound in an evil dream, from which there was no escape nor end. I meanwhile neither hoped nor feared; nothing survived in me but the consciousness of present suffering, and a great void somewhere.

"An hour or so before sunset we entered among the fields and palm-groves belonging to the town of Sook; and threaded them for

a good while before we came to a halt. This we did, not within the town itself, but at the door of a house that stood outside and alone among the gardens, on the very margin of the Euphrates stream. The owner of the house, Aboo-Salim by name, was himself of Bedouin family, and claimed descent from the Tey' clan ; but though, like his father and grandfather before him, he preferred a settled to a roving life, he had enough of the desert in him to have married, not a maid of the town, but a Bedouin girl of Shomer origin. He was well acquainted with most, if not all, of my companions ; and had always been on the best possible terms with the Benoo-Riah generally.

To this man's hospitality we now had recourse, and were not deceived in our expectations. Aboo-Salim received us kindly and generously, put his entire selamlık at our

service ; spread mattresses, his own and those which he lost no time in borrowing from his neighbours, for our weary and wounded ; gave himself a hand to bind up our cuts and gashes ; and set, not only food in abundance, but—what we all longed for much more,—clear cool water in plenty before us. Oh, that first draught from the red earth pitcher ! It was as a new in-pouring of life from the well of life. Our horses also were looked to, and their wants supplied ; Aboo-Salim, his wife, and his three tall handsome sons lending their help everywhere.

“Howeyrith, his eyes now wet for the loss of his mulatto half-brother, and Aman, who bewailed inconsolably the death of Sheebbeb, washed the clotted blood from my wounds, which were many and wide, but none deep, and bandaged them carefully. They then, after some vain attempts to persuade me to

eat, laid me on a mattress, covered me over, set water by me, and retired to the other side of the room. I have a faint remembrance of Ja'ad's face looking sadly at me, of Moḍarrib and Sa'ad holding some talk near me; and then, in spite of severe shooting pain, especially in my right arm, which had been badly slashed, I fell into a deep lethargic slumber, from which I did not awake for four-and-twenty hours.

“When I re-opened my eyes, Aman and Aboo-Salim with his family alone were by me. Before noon on the second day, the Bedouins had all departed, leaving me in charge of the hospitable owner of the house, who had promised to take good care of me till my complete recovery. Ja'ad and his party revisited first of all, as I learned later, the field of Marran, and there erected a pile of stones over Moḥarib's grave, since known

as 'Kabr-ul-'Ashik,'¹ and honoured by all passers by. Three years after I came that way myself, in circumstances and company ah! how different! with many fellow-travellers, yet ah! how lonely! The tombs of Ḥarith, Do'eyj, and Sheebbeb,—poor Doḥeym's bones whitened unburied between Doneyyib and the Theneeyah,—were scarcely discernible among the sand; but my true brother's cairn stood conspicuous to far off upon the plain.

“I slaughtered a camel, and poured out the blood upon the grave; then sat awhile by the cairn on the wind-swept plain, till my eyes streamed with tears; and I said,—

“Drifted sand and stony heap;—
There they laid thee down to sleep.
Warmer heart was never chilled,
Truer hand was never filled
With the grave's corrosive dust,
Grave unfaithful to its trust.

¹ “The lover's grave.”

Short thy course, but bravely run,
Deep thy rest, and early won.
All too hasty art thou gone,
Friend, and left me much alone.
I would not repine, but yet
Half must envy, long regret.
Could the resurrection be,
I had wished it but for thee ;
For though unchanged all else and new,
Thou unchanged would'st rise and true.'

"God have mercy on him," said Ṭanṭawee.
"I wonder what became of the girl, Hafṣah,
I think you called her name, whom he
loved !"

"I never heard," answered Hermann ; "but
she was a daughter of the Benoo-'Aḍra,¹ and
probably did not long, if at all, survive the
news of his death."

"It is a sad story" said the Egyptian ;
"sad for them ; sad, too, in many ways for
you who had so large a share in it."

¹ A tribe renowned among Arabs for the passionate-
ness of their love.

“True,” replied the other, “yet I would rather take the love with all the sadness, than live without love one day on earth. Life is pleasant, youth and strength are pleasant, liberty is pleasant, danger is pleasant; the voices of men, the gallop of a horse over the open country, the rush of the waves as the ship’s prow cuts through them, the air, the sky, the woods, the mountains, the plain, the sea, all these are pleasant,—but love is the only happiness, and when love ends may my life end also.”

Ṭanṭawee looked at him, but said nothing. A pause followed; then Hermann resumed his story.

“I have little more to tell. From the tombs of Marran the Benoo-Riaḥ returned northwards to Ḥillah, where the Emeer Faris then was, with the main body of his clan. But in spite of all the arbitration of the Emeer

'Ajlan could do, the 'blood-price' of the fallen was not settled between the tribe and the Benoo-Sheyban, nor paid over, till the following autumn.

"A month and a half I remained at Sook. My strength was indeed sufficiently restored before the end of that time to have left the place ; but partly I neither knew nor cared where next to go, and partly I hoped on for some intelligence, however slight, of the only subject on earth in which I yet felt interest. Little was all that I could gather, then or afterwards : shall I one day know more ?

"From that night at Doneyyib, that hour, she, Zahra',—the bride, they called her,—had never been seen or heard of again. The maid-servants, entering her tent shortly after the first outcry of alarm in the camp, found nothing there but solitude and darkness. Lights were brought, search was made within,

without ; but of her no trace was to be discovered. Part of her dress had been left in the tent ; some of her jewels and ornaments, too, lay here and there on the ground ; others were gone. She had fled then,—but whither ? All around the camp, in the neighbouring hollow, by the wells, among the sand-hills, they searched ; but neither she herself, nor any track, any sign of how or where she had fled, could be discovered. Perhaps the tumult and trampling to and fro of the night might have effaced the traces ; this only was certain, none appeared. Near she was not ; they next sought her afar. During several days, for weeks even, scouts went out in every direction,—east, north, south, west. They journeyed fast and far ; they questioned every encampment, every caravan, every wayfarer ; they visited every halting-place, every well, every village, plain

and hill, upland and lowland, in vain ; she had vanished. But when I heard that the Emeer's best mare, Dahma', a well-known racer of Nejdee breed, had disappeared also that night ; and that a lance of his, a sword, and a light coat of mail, were missing too ; I formed, though I did not give to words, my own conjectures ; and though I could gather no hope for myself, I feared less for her.

“ Daghfel was carried by his clansmen, who found him unable to bear a longer journey, to a village near Koweyt,¹ where he languished many weeks between life and death. Not till after days had passed did they venture to inform him of Zahra's flight ; but when they did so, he at once knew that she would never return to him ; and his rage

¹ A small seaport town, at the head of the Persian Gulf.

and grief brought on a paroxysm that had nearly proved fatal. However, at last, by slow degrees, he recovered in part, his wounds healed, though his former vigour and activity were lost for ever. Shattered in body and mind, he retraced his way to the pasture-grounds of Zulfeh, and the Benoo-Sheyban chose themselves another chief.

“Of Sheyk Asa’ad and the family at Diar-Bekr,—how they took the news, when it reached them, which it could not have failed to have done at last, and what became of them,—I never heard, nor, in truth, did I much seek to hear. For the sake of one alone I loved the place; and that one gone, it and all within it are things of the dead past to me; nor have I once wished to see and revisit it again.

“A month went by under Aboo-Salim’s roof; and during that time the faithful care

and attendance of Aman, joined to the untiring kindness of my host, his wife, and the other inmates of the house, had restored me to something of my former health and strength. I could now rise unaided and wander at will, first about the dwelling itself and the courtyard, then through the large palm-planted, canal-watered garden ; then in the dense plantations around the village, along the full canal, and down to the great river Euphrates, scarce a mile distant.

“ Day after day, week after week, passed thus, and yet I made no effort to quit the place and go elsewhere, however able to do so, but lingered on ; not that anything detained me there, but that I had nowhere else to go to, and could not resolve on any new plan of action or life. The West I had left long since, and the East seemed now to have left me. I was more isolated in the world

than a shipwrecked sailor alone on a rock in mid-sea.

“Weariness is repaired by rest, and the wounds of the body soon heal ; so do those of the soul sometimes, but not such as mine. Most hopeful of men once, I was now most hopeless : the full cup of perfect happiness had been brought all too near my lips, then ruthlessly dashed from them ; I had half-entered within the gates of Eden, then suddenly, violently, been thrust out, and the doors closed and barred behind me. My whole heart was numb, my whole life spilt. As I roamed, desultory and purposeless, beneath the palm-groves, through the gardens, the colours seemed to have been blotted out of herb and tree, earth and sky ; the rushing waters, the waving leaves, the moving figures of men, were pictured outlines, not realities ; sound and sight had no meaning ;

myself a mere mechanism, a shadow, a dream.

“ Everywhere, turn as I might, a dead blank was before me, from minute to minute, from hour to hour ; a void unfilled, which I knew not how to fill ; which nothing could fill. It was as though a whole existence had abruptly come to an end, and had now to be replaced by a new one, wanting as yet ; and I unable to tell whence it was to come, or how. For, after all, our human nature is capable of but one apt complement, and requires one ; if that one be withdrawn we become incomplete, aimless. An insect, when its antennae have been torn off, turns round and round in its place, not knowing any longer what to make of itself, or how to direct its course ; like it the hands of a watch when the balance-spring is broken ; so was I in this utter, final loss of her I loved.

“Is there a God in heaven? or is all chance, haphazard? or is it, indeed, blind fate, destiny, inevitable? A question often asked, often answered, never resolved; perhaps, because its disjunctive form should, to admit of a truthful reply, be changed for the conjunctive, and the solution be conveyed in a triple affirmative, till the growing knowledge of another and wider life shall make that triple single.

“But that answer is not ready in the hour of despondency like mine, when, almost broken-hearted, I asked myself this very question in the gardens of Sook. It was the fortieth evening after that night from which, in spite of myself, I long kept involuntary reckoning. I had strayed to some distance from the village, and had sat down in a date-grove, the last and farthest of all, by the bank of the main canal, near where it

joined the river. The autumn sun had already set, but a broad bright line of glowing red fringed the horizon west and south ; above it, a band of yellow ; above that, green ; fading upwards into the deep blue. No breath of wind stirred the warm still air ; except the distant barking of the town dogs, not a sound was to be heard. Alone, on an earth-heap, I watched the light fade by degrees between the outermost row of palm-trees, while the untiring stream flowed deep and rapid beneath the steep crumbling bank at my feet, and wished myself dead. Why should I live any longer, or to what end ?

“Then as night came on, and the pale disk of the moon covered itself with renewed brilliancy, and the great stars shone out one by one in the highest of the heavens, I gazed around on the calm earth, the calm sky, so lovely, so perfect in their calm, so full of hidden

energy and life, and felt fresh strength and energy rise up within me. Great, irreparable indeed, had been my loss—bitter as death my grief—yet in some ways, in many ways, it was well. Well to be alone, to fight my battle single-handed, to let my own thoughts, my own actions, work themselves out and unravel themselves of themselves, not through or with another. The creeper clothes the tree, adorns it, gives it a bright and green outer life ; but all the while it weakens, cramps, unsinews, till the tree becomes itself almost a creeper. Better then, perhaps, that the creeper be stripped off, however roughly, while yet is time, lest the uncovered tree, bared too late, should wither and die. It has happened to many.

“True ; yet no love could ever replace the lost love, no face be to me what that face had been. What then should henceforth stand me in love’s place ? What re-knit the loosened

existence ? For what should I labour, when the only prize that could reward my labour was irrecoverably withdrawn ? What profit was there in the strife that could never win a crown ? Had I but hope !—but no,—there was no hope, —reason said it. Where was she now ? Where I ? What likelihood that we should ever meet again ?

“While thus I thought, or rather felt,—for connected thought was not in my power,—I heard a sound as of singing ; a pleasant voice, drawing nearer and nearer to my retreat. The voice came, it seemed, from a bend of the river higher up, not far off, but hidden from me by a clump of trees ; for the plantation was at the angle where the canal joined the main stream ; scarce five minutes, distance from the hillock on which I sat. As the song approached, it ceased ; and in its stead I thought I could distinguish the splash of oars, moved leisurely

through the water. I stood up and watched for the moment when the boat itself should come in sight from behind the trees ; but before it did so, and while, though hidden, almost at its nearest to me, a second voice, a man's also, but clearer and sweeter, and louder than the first, took up the song. I listened ; every word, every note, reached me distinct across the smooth stream surface. Thus it came :

“ ‘After years ;
After joys together tasted,
After years in absence wasted,
Bitterest bitter, sweetest sweet,
In the garden porch we meet,
After years.

“ ‘After years ;
O'er us as in former time
The red roses conscious twine
Lattice-up ; and hand-in-hand
Mid the chequered light we stand,
After years.

“ ‘After years ;
Each had long forecast that day,
Each had thought of much to say,

Plaint of love till then deferred ;
Yet we neither uttered word,
After years.

“ ‘After years ;
Water to the drought-cleft lip,
Haven to the storm-vexed ship,
Stillest rest from toil outdone,
These were ours, and more in one,
After years.

“ ‘After years ;
Calm no reasoned thought could reach,
Thoughts beyond the range of speech,
Joys that life and change outlast,
Deep as death our lot was cast,
After years.

“ ‘After years ;
From the never of those years,
From the waste whose dews are tears,
Thus we pluck thee evermore
Of the sunlight Eden shore,
After years.

“ ‘After years ;
In the latter month of May
Bloomed the roses, glowed the day.
Hand-in-hand we stood, to know
All can love on love bestow
After years.’

“The voice ceased; the sound of oars followed, now close at hand. While the song lasted, I had remained motionless as if entranced; I now roused myself and ran to the edge of the bank. Before me the Euphrates, lighted up by the brilliant moon, swept along in silver eddies between low black lines of shore; and half way across, a small boat, in which two figures sat, floated rapidly down the river; a ripply line of light parted right from under the bows; and the oars, now raised, now lowered, dripped sparkles on the glassy face of the water that they cleft. Of the two within the boat, one rowed, one sat quiet near the stern; but of neither could I discern the features, or anything to recognise by in form or dress. As I looked on the seated figure turned towards me, half-rose, and waved a hand; an instant later the boat and those in it had disappeared from sight

behind a tongue of tall rushes opposite the corner where the canal bent round to join the river.

“Not knowing what to think, or who the singers were, whence they came, and what the meaning of their song, and of the signal, if signal it was, that had followed it, I stood fixed and gazing at the spot where the boat had vanished, as if I expected to see it reappear. When, at last, aware of the idleness of my watch, I turned, Aboo-Seleem's third son stood beside me. My prolonged absence from the house had caused some anxiety, and the youngster had, by his father's order, been searching for me everywhere. Of the boat and those in it, he had, it was evident by his manner, neither seen nor heard anything ; I asked nothing, and made no allusion to the subject then or afterwards, but followed the lad indoors silently.

“The change had been wrought; I was not indeed my whole former self, yet still Aḥmed Agha, ready for life and action once more. After a short but refreshing sleep, cheered by hopeful dreams, I woke to the projects and interests of the future; called Aman, and bade him to prepare for a journey to distant lands. It was Friday; at noon I dressed myself with care, went to the mosque and joined in the prayers of the day, and an hour later embarked on a large boat, bound for Baṣrah. From that hour began a new series of events and wanderings, by land and sea, that have at last, as you know, brought me to Egypt, and thence hither.

“Enough of this; I will go and lie down for the hour or two that remain to dawn; you too, will have need of repose before the work of the day: it will be a full one for us all. Good-night.” And without waiting for further

talk he took up the striped mughrebee¹ blanket on which he had been seated, and removed to another part of the deck, where he composed himself to sleep. Ṭanṭawee remained for a few minutes where he was, silent and thoughtful, looking at the masts against the sky, and the star-shine on the water, till he too lay down and slept.

“Next morning the ship anchored before 'Akka.”

¹ That is, from the “Mughreb,” or north African coast, where the best of such articles are manufactured.

THE END.

LONDON, *May*, 1872.

A

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